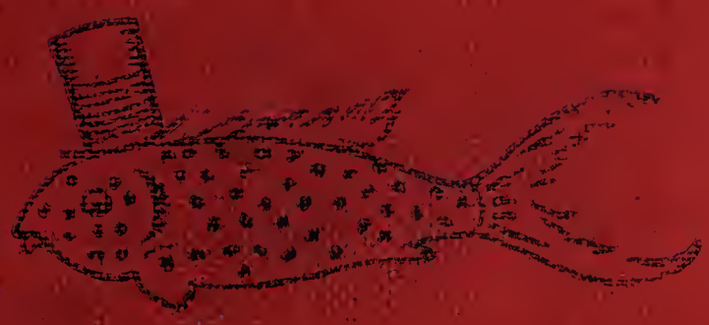
TRIGGER BERG AND THE COCKEYED GHOST



BY LEO EDWARDS

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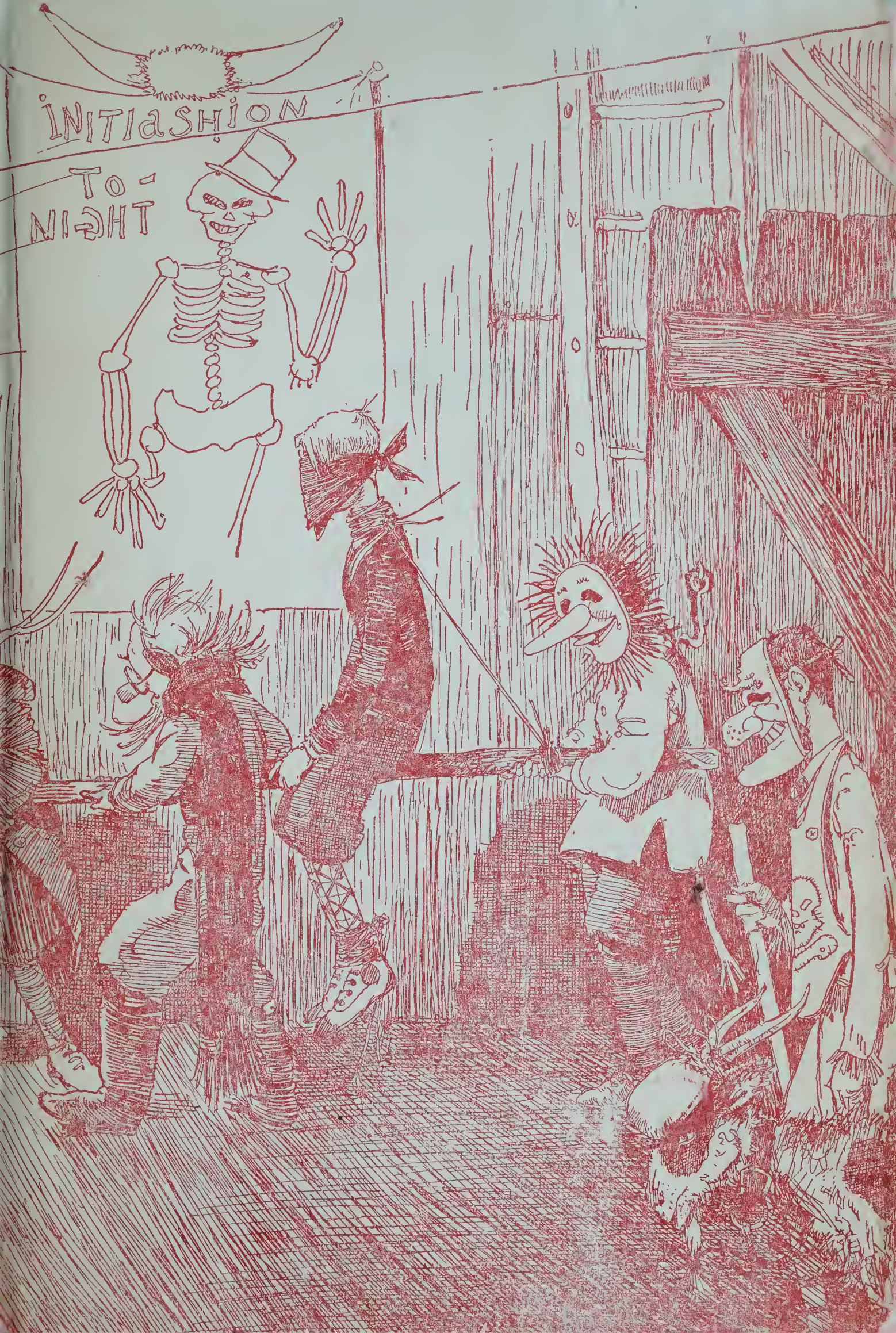
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TRIGGER BERG AND THE COCKEYED GHOST

Jack R. Woods
from Mother & Father
Xmas 1933.
(1933)

TRIGGER BERG
AND THE
COCKEYED GHOST

BY

LEO EDWARDS

AUTHOR OF
THE JERRY TODD BOOKS
THE POPPY OTT BOOKS
THE ANDY BLAKE BOOKS
THE TUFFY BEAN BOOKS

ILLUSTRATED BY

BERT SALG

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To

DAVID WISDOM

of

Kansas City, Missouri.

The first boy in America

to play the part of

Tail Light on

the air.

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Trigger Berg and His 700 Mouse Traps
Trigger Berg and the Sacred Pig
Trigger Berg and the Cockeyed Ghost

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Jerry Todd and the Rose-Colored Cat
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Andy Blake's Secret Service
Andy Blake and the Pot of Gold

TRIGGER BERG AND THE COCKEYED GHOST

CHAPTER I

A NEW DIARY

October 21—Tony Crooker and I had another mix-up to-night after school. And when I got home my ma gave me the dickens.

"Goodness gracious!" says she, looking me over. "What happened to you? Did you get in the way of a coal wagon?"

"I'm hungry," says I.

"Of course," says she. "You always are. But that doesn't explain how you got those black spots all over your shirt."

"It was Tony Crooker," says I.

"What do you mean?" says she quickly.

"He flipped ink on me in arithmetic class," says I.

"*Ink?*" says she, sort of stiffening. Then she took a closer look at me. "Of all things!" says she. "It *is* ink. And is that what we pay the teacher for?—to let you boys flip ink at each

other? It's a wonder," says she, getting stiffer every minute, "that the school board doesn't buy a lot of red paint and let you flip that around for a change. They might get some blue paint too, and some white paint. Then you could be patriotic about it. . . . Take it off," she wound up crossly, "and I'll soak it in sour milk."

"What?" says I.

"Why, your shirt, of course."

So I took it off and handed it to her. But instead of soaking it in sour milk, like she said, she just stood there and stared at me.

"Why, Henry Wadsworth Longfellow Berg!" says she. "Just look at yourself! You've got ink all over your undershirt too."

"It soaked through," says I.

"I'm glad," says she, "that I haven't got a dozen boys to look after."

"Yes," says I quickly, "and I'm glad too."

"What are you glad about?" says she.

"I'm glad," says I, "that you didn't know any Chinese poets when I was born. Or maybe my name would be One Lung instead of Longfellow."

That set her to smiling.

"What's the matter, Trigger?" says she, putting an arm around me. "Don't you like the name we gave you?"

"The Henry part is all right," says I. "But

I don't know why you had to go and put in all that Longfellow stuff."

"Well," says she, sort of crisp-like, "I'll call you something worse than Longfellow, if you ever come home with another shirt like that."

"Henry Wadsworth Longfellow Berg!" I dished it all out in one breath. "It's no wonder," says I, "that the kids laughed at me when the new teacher came to town."

"By the way," says my ma, "what does your teacher do at school besides letting you pitch ink at each other? Do you ever study anything about the earth being round, and how hard it is for mothers to get ink stains out of white shirts?"

I laughed right out then.

"The next time you see Tail Light," says I, "you want to ask *him* about the earth. He can tell you if it's round or not."

My ma went to the telephone then. For it was jingling to beat the cars. And pretty soon, when I peeked out of the back door, there sat Friday on the porch steps. He was waiting for me.

Friday is a swell pal. And he's got the biggest thumb wart of any kid in Crocketville. Boy! If I had a wart like that I'd think I was in heaven. But his ma shudders every time she looks at it. And once she hired Doc Fosse to stick an electric needle into it, thinking, I guess,

that it would drop off after a day or two. But instead of dropping off, it got bigger and bigger. Now Friday can stick pins in it. And you should hear the girls squeal! They think it hurts. But I happen to know that it doesn't hurt at all.

When I saw what Friday's wart was doing for him I tried to get one like it by rubbing his thumb against mine. But it didn't work. Gee! I wish I did have a nice big wart, with a needle hole in it. Then I could show off in front of Betty Sharpe. I heard to-day that she's getting up another party. I'd go to it too if I got a chance. But I suppose she'll keep on turning up her nose at me and leave me out. That's what she did when she got up her last party. She didn't even invite Friday then. But I suppose it will make a difference now that he's a hero.

The next time I see Doc Fosse I'm going to ask him if he knows how to make warts. I bet he does. Or maybe, if I get a chance, I'll ask Dr. Vett. Still, I don't know whether I want to ask him or not. For he's got a queer look in his eyes. And I've heard that he's got a lot of queer ideas in his head too.

There was a time when he did almost all of the doctoring in Crocketville. And I think it was him who operated on my Aunt Hilda the time she swallowed her false teeth. But nowdays al-

most everybody with a pain goes to Doc Fosse. From which you can see that Crocketville isn't very big—with only two doctors. But I think it's the peachiest town in the whole United States. And with the exception of Tail Light I think I've got the peachiest gang in the whole United States.

Certainly I'd have to walk a good many miles to find a sweller kid than Friday. His real name is Ronald Fish. That's what the teacher calls him. But we call him Friday because on Friday you always get fish. Pretty clever, huh? He and I are bigger than Tail Light, who follows us around like a cow's tail. And can he say the dumbest things! Oh, oh! Like to-day in school. The teacher asked him to give her three reasons why the earth was round. And he said, *you* say so and my *ma* says so and my *pa* says so, so it must be so. That's what I was going to tell my ma when she went to the telephone.

Another time the teacher asked him why he was scratching his head. And he said, because I'm the only one that knows where it itches. Can you beat that?

I don't think we'd put up with him if it wasn't for his older brother Slats. But you know how it is—if you've got one brother in your gang you can't very well kick the other out, even if he is a pain in the neck. And I can't imagine what our gang would be like without Slats.

He's one of the head officers in our secret lodge too. And it's his swell ideas that keep us on the jump.

Mrs. Beale has an awful time worrying about her two sons. One is as skinny as a washboard. And the other puffs out on all sides like a feather pillow. In fact Tail Light got to puffing out so much last winter that his ma took him to see a doctor. He was a sight. And what do you think caused it? The little glutton was drinking the cream off the milk bottles when his folks were in bed. Slats and I caught him at it. So he didn't dast to do it any more. And to his ma's great joy he started to pull in.

I think that's all I'll put down in my new diary to-night. For I feel kind of stiff after that fight with Tony Crooker. And a fellow doesn't feel like writing in a diary when he's stiff.

Still, my Uncle Ben told me that I should put down everything that happened to me. I shouldn't skip a single day, he said. And as fast as I get my diaries filled up (I've already written three) he makes them into books. It's pretty swell, I think, to have a rich uncle who prints books. And I'm glad he likes me so well.

Gee! I'll never forget how tickled I was when I saw my first diary made up into a book. And yet, when I read it, I felt kind of funny too. For a lot of the words and other stuff looked queer to me. It wasn't like I put it down at all.

My Uncle Ben had told me that he was going to have a regular author take the diary and fix it up. But I never dreamed that Mr. Edwards would make so many changes in it. I guess though I don't know much about spelling and period marks. Still, everything I said was there. Only Mr. Edwards made it more book-like.

Well, that's all right. A kid like me can't expect to have everything his own way. Thousands of kids are writing diaries which never get published at all. So I guess I'm pretty lucky, all right.

My Uncle Ben lives in New York. His home is a lot sweller than ours. And when he comes to visit us my ma acts kind of fussed. She's afraid that things won't be nice enough for him. But I think he'd still come to see me if I lived in an old box car. I think he comes to see me because he likes me.

And what do you suppose he told me in his last letter? He was putting money in the bank for me, he said. Every time he sold a bunch of my books, he put the royalty money in the bank. So maybe, when I get big enough to go to college, I won't have to depend on my pa.

He isn't rich like my Uncle Ben. He works hard every day in a coal office. And sometimes I hear him telling my ma about the things he'd like to buy if he could afford it. I have a dandy home. But it isn't a swell home. It's just a plain

good home, with a lot of fun in it, and the best ma and pa that ever lived.

With my swell ma and my pa, and my dandy chums, I think I'm the luckiest boy in the whole world.

(Later.) My ma just came upstairs to kiss me good-night. I wasn't to worry about the ink stains, she said. For she could easily fix that up. She'd rather wash out ink stains all the rest of her life, she said, than to lose me. Then she gave me a big gumdrop. It was pink. When I got it chewed up, and swallowed, I told her about the fight. Tony Crooker started to chase me, I said. But instead of running away, as he expected, I turned on him and knocked the tar out of him.

She didn't like to have me fight, she said, as she sat on the edge of the bed with the cat in her lap. But if I was forced into a fight, and I felt I was in the right, she wanted me to fight just as hard as I could. She said she wanted me to play just as hard as I could too, and study just as hard as I could. If I did everything just as hard as I could, she said, I'd be better prepared to take care of myself when I got big. Wishy-washy people, she said, who didn't work hard or play hard, never got far.

I told her I was going to be a better man than Tony Crooker. He lied and cheated, I said, and he had a tough gang. Then I told her what

a swell gang I had, and how we stood at the altar in our lodge room and swore to keep our secrets and do useful things. She acted kind of funny when I told her that our lodge-room altar was an old garbage can that we got out of the town dump. We kept it turned upside-down, I said. I was going to tell her about our lodge Bible too, which is an old doctor book. But just then my pa let out a yelp from the bath room.

He was in there doctoring his corns.

"Holy smoke!" says he, as he jumped around on one foot like a crane. "What makes that stuff smart so?"

"What stuff?" says my ma, giving him her attention.

"Why, the stuff I put on my corns. It burns like sixty."

"I didn't know it was there," says ma, kind of surprised-like. "I thought you left it downstairs on the ice box."

"What's that?" says my pa, holding up a bottle. "Isn't that it?"

My ma let out a squeal.

"Good heavens!" says she, flying into the bathroom. "That isn't corn medicine."

"What is it?" says my pa, looking kind of sick.

"It's acid. I keep it in here to take spots off the bath tub."

That made my pa jump worse than ever.

"Get the doctor," he yelled. "Hurry up and get the doctor, before my toes drop off."

"Don't be silly," says my ma. "You don't need a doctor for that. Just put your feet in the bath tub and turn the water on them."

My pa was kind of peeved now.

"Any sensible housekeeper," says he, as he sat on the slippery edge of the bath tub and dangled his feet in the water, "wouldn't leave stuff like that sittin' around. It's a wonder," he growled some more, "That Trigger and I didn't get poisoned years ago."

"Yes," says my ma sharply, "and it's a wonder that I didn't get a broken back years ago from picking up your stuff. There's your coat over there on that chair. And there's your shoes, right in the middle of the hall. How do you expect your only son to be neat," says she, "if you don't set him a good example?"

The tub was half full of water now. And all of a sudden my pa slipped and sat down in it. Gee! I thought I'd bust.

"It's all your fault," he told my ma, when he finally got out of the tub. "For I wouldn't 'a' had to sit there like that if you hadn't tried to poison me."

"Well," says she, trying to keep her face straight, "don't stand there and drip water all over the floor. Take your pants off and hang them over the tub."

I was hanging around the door.

"Can I put it in my diary?" says I, when my pa kind of quieted down.

"What?" he grunted.

"About you sliding into the tub," says I.

My ma spoke up.

"Of course," says she sweetly. "Go ahead and put it in, Trigger. I think your Uncle Ben will enjoy reading it."

My pa looked kind of sour.

"I thought you finished your diary," says he to me.

"I did finish my 'Sacred Pig' diary," says I. "I finished it last night. And as soon as I got through telling about the 'Sacred Pig,' I started a new diary. I wrote in it for the first time tonight. And now I guess I'll go back to my room and write in it some more."

My ma giggled.

"Yes," says she, "that's a very good idea. And when you get it all written down—about how your pa's head went down and his feet went up—I'll come in and read it. I need something like that to cheer me up, after all this mess."

My pa limped into the hall.

"It's a good thing," says he, "that I didn't plan on going to that coal convention. For my feet feel like boils."

"They do look kind of red," says I.

"Yes," says he, sort of threatening-like, "and I know something else that will be red, right where you sit down, if you don't go back to bed and dry up."

"O-k," says I, starting off.

But instead of going to bed, like he said, I shut my bedroom door and got out my diary.

It was just as hot as ever to-day. My ma says she never knew such a hot fall. But I bet it won't be hot much longer. For next week is Hallowe'en. And it's usually pretty chilly in our town on Hallowe'en. For I live in Illinois

CHAPTER II

HALLOWE'EN TALK

October 22—My pa groaned all night. But when morning came he got up as usual and put on his shoes. So I guess he'll be all right in a day or two.

It wasn't quite so hot to-day. And to-night the newspaper said that we're going to have a hard frost. I'm glad of that. For Friday and I know where there's a swell big walnut tree. It's over by the old Vett house. We got a few nuts this noon, on the way to school. But the real fun will come after a hard frost. For then the nuts will tumble down to beat the cars. I bet we get four bushels at least. And if we divide up with Slats and Tail Light, that will be a bushel apiece.

As soon as breakfast was over this morning I hurried down the street to Friday's house, to tell him about my pa's sore toes. I laughed so hard, I said, that I almost died. And Friday almost died too, when I came to the part where my poor pa slid into the tub.

It was time now for us to go to school. So we started out. And when we came to Whaley's alley there was Tony Crooker laying for us with a bunch of rotten tomatoes. He thought he could make me run. But instead of running away from him, as he expected, I got Friday to help me and we closed in on him from both sides.

Boy! Talk about *fun!* It was kind of hard at first for us to duck the flying tomatoes. But we kept getting closer and closer. Tony didn't like that. So, to save himself, he finally dropped his ammunition and fled. After which, of course, it was *our* turn to do some lively tomato pitching.

I had a lot of trouble with Tony in the "Sacred Pig" story. That's why he's got it in for me. He still believes that his gang can lick my gang. So some day, I suppose, we'll have to get together and fight it out. But he knows now that I can lick him single-handed. For I proved it last night after school.

The teacher has an awful time with him in school. For he's the dumbest thing that ever walked on two legs. Why, he can't even multiply without help. And the other day when the teacher asked him how long it would take Mrs. A to can a bushel of cherries if Mrs. B and Mrs. C could do the job in half the time, or something like that, he said he didn't know because he never ate cherries.

He had bragged to his chums that he would run me all the way to school. So they were waiting in front of the schoolhouse to see the fun. But to their surprise it was the leader himself who tumbled into the school grounds with tomato seeds in his hair. Boy! They didn't like that for two cents. And if Friday and I hadn't ducked into a public garage I dare say they would have started after us with a flock of rocks.

They're loyal, all right, though I sometimes wonder how a dumb cluck like Tony can keep a gang together. Still I guess some kids will follow any kind of a leader if he acts tough.

I was all sticky from handling the rotten tomatoes. So I stepped into the garage wash room to clean up.

"Say, Trigger," says Friday, when I came out, "did you know that Betty Sharpe is getting up a Hallowe'en party?"

"Yes," says I, "I know all about it."

"I think I could get an invite," says he, "if I wanted it."

"Yes," says I, sort of stiff-like, "I think you could—with that big wart of yours. I think Betty would even marry you, if you asked her to."

He grinned.

"What's the matter?" says he. "Are you jealous because I've got a big wart and you haven't?"

"You're lucky," says I.

"But if you want a wart of your own," says he, "why don't you go ahead and make it?"

"You talk as though I haven't tried," says I. "But you know blamed well that I have. They just don't grow on me, that's all."

"Well," says he, glancing around at the tire supplies, "if you can't grow one on you, why don't you get busy and fix up a rubber one?"

Gee! I hadn't thought of that.

"I bet I can fix up one," says I.

Getting a gob of tire dough from the repair man I put it on the back of my hand. But it didn't look like a wart at all. So I started to pull it off.

"What are you doing?" says a voice behind me. And when I turned, there stood Dr. Vett!

It seemed to me that his eyes looked wilder than ever. And as he kept staring at me I found myself wondering if the stories that I had heard about him were true—about him having ghosts in his home and stuff like that.

The Vett homestead, near Washington Park, is one of the oldest buildings of its kind in Crocketville. It's one of the biggest too. At night it has a sort of shivery mysterious look—as though queer things were going on there. And I've often wondered how Mrs. Ada Clarkey had the nerve to live there. But I guess she's

used to ghosts. For that's all her husband talked about when he was alive.

He was a scientist of some kind. And he spent thousands of dollars of his own money trying to prove to the world that there was no such thing as a real ghost. Whenever he heard of a haunted house, he either went there himself, to prove that the ghost was a fake, or hired someone else to do the job for him. He got other scientists to work with him. And they had a big name for themselves. I can't remember it now. But if I happen to think of it I'll write it down. Anyway it was a society for exposing fake ghosts—I know that much.

The Crocketville people often wondered how the scientist and his cuckoo-acting brother-in-law got along together. And then there was more wonderment when the ghost-hunter's widow came back to her girlhood home to live. It must seem queer to her, the people said, to step out of one life into the other. And wherever she went curious eyes followed her. I always liked her myself. For she has a round jolly face. But her brother gives me the creeps. To see them together you'd never suspect that they were brother and sister. For one is short and dumpy, with yellow hair and blue eyes, while the other is tall and muscular, with a mop of coal-black hair and feverish black eyes.

I don't like to talk to men like that. So I tried to get away. But he stepped in front of me and cut me off.

"What's that on your hand?" he further demanded.

"Tire dough," says I.

"That's a queer place to put tire dough," says he.

"I tried to make a wart," says I.

I don't know what there was about that to scare him. But he got as white as a sheet. And turning, he jumped over the stone wall that surrounds his big home and disappeared into the bushes.

Then along came Mrs. Clarkey herself, sort of waddling-like, with a market basket on her arm.

"Why, good morning, Trigger," says she, in her pleasant way. "What seems to be the matter with you? You look startled."

I didn't like to tell her that her brother had just scared the wits out of me. But I think she caught on. For an anxious look came into her face. And I could see her hand tremble as she fumbled with the iron latch of her gate.

Evidently she had seen him jump over the wall.

Friday spoke up then.

"Say, Mrs. Clarkey," says he, "do you know anything about medicine?"

"Why, yes," says she, as her eyes nervously searched the bushy yard. "I know quite a lot about medicine. For I did considerable nursing when I was a girl."

"Is there such a thing as a wart maker?"

"A wart maker?" she repeated, giving Friday a puzzled look. "Do you mean a wart cure?"

"No," he shook his head. "I mean a wart maker—something to make warts."

And then he told her how I wanted to make a wart so that I could stick pins in it and get an invitation to Betty Sharpe's Hallowe'en party.

Mrs. Clarkey was laughing now. And it seemed to me that she shook all over.

"Don't you worry, Trigger," says she, patting me on the back. "I'll see that you get an invitation to Betty's party. And you won't need a wart, either."

"What are you going to do?" says I quickly. "Ask Betty to invite me?"

"I'm going to invite you myself," says she.

"I don't think I'd care to go to the party on your invitation," says I.

"No?" says she, with another laugh. "Well, you may change your mind."

She was on the inside of the gate now.

"Maybe you didn't know," says she, "that Betty is a distant relative of my late husband's. And the party is to be held here."

A Hallowe'en party in the old Vett house!

"Hot dog!" I cried, giving my cap a pitch. And then, catching it, I lit out for the schoolhouse lickety-cut.

Betty and I bumped into each other in the hall.

"Rowdy!" says she, in her uppish way. And up went her nose, like a poodle's tail.

"I never knew till this morning," says I, "that you were related to Mrs. Clarkey."

"I could tell you a lot of things that you don't know," says she.

"Anyway," says I, "I know how to be mannerly."

She showed more curiosity then.

"What were you doing over to my cousin's?" says she. "Hanging around for an invitation?"

That made me sore.

"I wouldn't go to your old party," says I, "if I got a million invitations."

"I'm going to invite Friday," says she. "And I'm going to invite the two Beale boys. But I don't intend to invite you."

"If they go," says I, "they aren't as particular as they used to be."

She found out then that her nose wasn't quite high enough. So up it went another notch.

"I think you're perfectly hateful," says she.

"If you aren't careful," says I, "you're lia-

ble to drop your nose down the back of your neck and lose it."

"I'm quite capable," says she loftily, "of taking care of my own nose."

"With a handkerchief, huh?"

That made her eyes flash.

"I'm going to tell the teacher on you."

"All right," says I. "Go ahead and tell her. I should worry."

"Miss Squeeze! Miss Squeeze! Make Trigger quit talking mean to me."

That brought the teacher into sight.

"What did he say, Betty?"

"He told me to wipe my nose."

"Well," the teacher spoke sharply, "go ahead and wipe it. And then take your seat."

That made Betty madder than ever. And every time I looked at her to-day she made a face at me. It's a cinch that I'll never get an invitation to *her* party, no matter where she holds it. But I don't care. If the other guys want to go to her old party, and leave me at home, it's all right with me.

And to think that I even tried to get a new wart just to please her! I certainly was a big sap, all right. But I'm cured. I wouldn't take a wart now if it was offered to me on a gold platter.

I did a lot of school work to-day. And I did a

lot of playing. But somehow all through my work and my play I kept thinking of Dr. Vett. I couldn't get him out of my mind. And to-night I'm still wondering why he acted so blamed queer when I told him that I was trying to make an imitation wart on my hand. His sister acted queer too when she learned that he had been talking to me. She seemed worried and sort of distressed-like.

I guess the stories about that old house are true. Still, if there's anything wrong in the house—I mean, if Dr. Vett is actually crazy, or something like that—Mrs. Clarkey wouldn't let the kids hold a party there.

Darn it! I *would* like to go to that party. For I have a hunch that it's going to be spookier than the dickens. And maybe something will happen that Betty least expects!

Dr. Vett has one whole wing of the house to himself. It's there that he has his office on the ground floor. Back of the office is a small library. And over the library, on the second floor, is the place where he mixes up his stuff. He calls it a laboratory. And to get to it he goes up and down a tiny circular staircase.

I've seen all this stuff myself. For one time when Doc Fosse was out of town I went over there to get some medicine for my throat. I remember a skeleton. It stood in a glass case just inside the library door. I wondered at the time

why the skeleton didn't have a head. Then, as I looked around, I found a skull in another part of the room. It was a funny-looking skull. Sort of learing and cockeyed.

Stuff like that is swell for Hallowe'en. And Betty wasn't dumb when she picked out that place for a party.

When school was out to-night I went over to Friday's house to help him water some new trees that his pa had just set out. But Mrs. Fish turned the water off, and sent me home, when we accidentally turned the hose through the parlor window.

If it doesn't get too chilly we're going to have a lodge meeting to-morrow night in Friday's barn. And after that we may have to put away our altar and lodge Bible till next spring. For there's no fun sitting up there in the cold.

Friday asked his pa to-day if we could build a fireplace in the barn. But instead of saying yes or no, Mr. Fish just looked at us. I guess he thinks we don't know much.

Oh, yes! I just thought of the name of that queer society that Mrs. Clarkey's husband got up. It's the American Association of Psychic Research.

There now! Didn't I tell you that it was an old jaw-breaker of a name? Anything that's psychic is about ghosts. And Mr. Clarkey tried his best to prove to everybody that there was

no such thing as a real ghost. But he failed to convince his own brother-in-law.

I wonder why it is that Dr. Vett is so dead sure about ghosts? Has he really got a secret of some kind? Or is he just kind of cuckoo?

I get all excited when I think of it.

CHAPTER III

FRIED ONIONS

October 23—What do you know about it! My ma has gone to Chicago with my pa to attend a coal convention. And to-night Friday and I have the house all to ourselves. He's going to stay with me till my ma gets back. And if we don't have some bully good fun during the next few days I'll eat my shirt.

My ma came to the door to meet me this noon. And as soon as I got a look at her face I knew that something had happened. For she was smiling from ear to ear.

"Trigger," says she, "would you feel neglected if I went to Chicago with your father and left you here to keep house?"

"What's the big idea?" says I, staring at her.

And it was then that she told me about the coal convention.

"But why can't I go too?" says I.

Her face dropped.

"I was afraid you'd say that," says she.

"Please," I coaxed.

"No, Trigger," she shook her head. "I'd rather stay home than take you out of school."

I gave in then. For she does a lot for me. And I didn't want to disappoint her.

"All right," says I cheerfully, as I hurried to the kitchen to wash my hands for dinner. "It's o-k with me."

"And you're sure," says she, following me to the kitchen, "that you won't feel neglected?"

"Of course not," says I.

"Your father got a telegram this morning urging him to come to the convention. They want me to come too. And as soon as I heard about the message I got busy and put some beans to soak. They're over there in that pan. I'm going to bake them this afternoon. So they'll be all ready for you to-night when you get home. And I'm going to cook some other stuff for you."

"You're swell," says I, giving her a hug.

"Yes," says she, returning my hug, "and I think you're swell too."

"Is pa going to buy some coal while he's away?" says I.

"No," says she. "But he does feel that the convention is important. Otherwise he wouldn't go to it with a sore foot."

"How is his foot?" says I quickly.

"Oh," says she, "he's able to get around on it. But it still hurts him."

"I bet you have a swell time," says I.

She gave me another hug.

"I'd have a better time," says she, "if you were going with me."

"Shucks!" says I. "You needn't worry about me. For I'll be all right."

"I don't want to burden you with unnecessary housework, Trigger," she then spoke earnestly, "but please be as neat as you can. And don't forget to feed the cat."

I grinned.

"That won't be hard," says I. "For if I let the canary out of its cage the cat will feed itself."

She knew I was joking.

"The ice man will be here to-morrow morning," says she. "So you better leave the back door open when you go to school."

"How about the rubber plant?" says I. "Is it all right on the front porch?"

"I think so. But it might be well to cover it up at night. For Uncle Hezzie brought it all the way from Brazil. And I don't want to lose it."

"O-k," says I, sliding into my regular place at the dinner table.

It seemed to me that Betty hung around Friday more than ever to-day. Such a wonderful wart! Humph! I bet my ma never acted that way when she was a girl. If my pa had a wart I bet she told him to keep it out of sight. But to

hear Betty rave you'd think that a wart with a few pins stuck in it was the most wonderful thing in the whole world.

It's all right for a fellow to fool around with the girls now and then. I don't mind that. But Friday was carrying it too far. He was even getting mushy. So when school was out this afternoon I put the old beezer to work. There ought to be some way, I told myself, of prying him and Betty apart.

And then I thought of fried onions!

Friday loves fried onions. And Betty hates them. So why not coax him over to my house and stuff him to the gills?

I thought of that when we were walking home from school together.

Gee! I could see all kinds of fun ahead. So I hurried up and told him about the coal convention. My pa and my ma were going to Chicago, I said. And all the time they were gone I'd have to stay alone and do my own cooking.

"Is that a hint," says Friday, "for me to invite you over to my house to eat?"

I shook my head.

"No," says I. "I couldn't come over to your house and eat if I wanted to. For I promised my ma that I'd stay at home and do my own cooking."

"When's she leaving?" says Friday.

"To-night, at six o'clock," says I.

"And are you going to sleep over there all alone?" says he.

"Sure thing," says I.

"What are you going to have for breakfast?" says he.

"Raw onions," says I.

That made him blink.

"*Raw onions?*" says he, staring at me.

"Raw onions," says I.

"What are you going to do?" says he. "Mix them in your oatmeal?"

"There won't be any oatmeal," says I.

"Just raw onions, huh?" says he, as he kept on staring at me.

"Just raw onions," says I.

"And what are you going to have for dinner?" says he. "Onion soup?"

I turned up my nose.

"Onion soup!" says I scornfully. "As though you'd catch *me* monkeying around with *onion soup*. Give 'em to me nice and strong," says I, "right out of the frying pan."

His forehead was puckered up now.

"Say," says he, sort of squinting at me through his eyebrows, "is there anything wrong with you?"

But I didn't bother to answer that.

"Onion soup is all right for infants," says I, with a grand gesture. "But I want to get big and strong."

"Now I know it," says he.

"What?" says I.

"That you fell out of bed last night and landed on your head."

"Of course," says I, with another big gesture, "I don't expect to have fried onions for dinner and supper both."

"No?" says he pleasantly. "Well, that's something to be thankful for."

"Fried onions are all right for dinner," says I. "But I think I'll have 'em boiled for supper."

"And you're sure," says he, sort of focusing his eyes on me, "that you haven't overlooked anything?"

"Meaning which?" says I.

"Well," says he, "you *can* buy pickled onions in bottles, you know."

I let on that I was tickled.

"That's an idea," says I brightly. "I'll have raw onions for breakfast, fried onions for dinner, boiled onions for supper, and I'll put pickled onions on my cake."

"Excuse me," says he, backing off. "I think I'll go home and make a gas mask."

"I'm going to be big and strong," says I, stretching my arms.

"Anyway," says he, "I bet you have a strong breath."

"Did you ever hear of Samson?" says I.

That was more than he could stand.

"Look here," says he, sort of anxious-like. "I don't care how many onions you eat. Eat 'em raw or cooked or any other way, if you want to. But if you start tipping buildings over, like that Samson guy in the Bible, you're going to get yourself talked about."

I sat down then and laughed to beat the cars.

"I was just fooling about the raw onions," says I. "But I *am* going to have some fried onions to-morrow noon. And if they taste as good as I think, I'm going to have some more to-morrow night."

"I kind of like fried onions myself," says he longingly.

"All my life," says I, "I've been wanting to cook myself a great big pan of fried onions. And now's my chance."

"Doesn't your ma ever cook them for you?" says he.

"Of course," says I. "But she never cooks enough."

"How long is she going to be gone?" says he.

"Till Sunday morning," says I.

"Wednesday, Thursday, Friday and Saturday," says he, counting off the days on his fingers. "Well, you certainly ought to get filled up on fried onions by Saturday night."

I figured it was time to hook him.

"How about it?" says I generously. "Do you want to stay with me till my folks get back?"

"Sure thing," says he eagerly.

So I stopped at the grocery store where we trade and told them to send up a bushel of onions. I wanted the smelliest ones they had, I said. Then I went home to say good-by to my ma and my pa.

"And are you sure," says my ma, as she shoved a curling iron into her grip, "that you won't get lonesome while we're gone?"

"Of course I will," says I. "But that's all right. I want you and pa to have a good time."

"If it wasn't for keeping you out of school," says she, "we'd take you with us."

"I'll be all right here," says I.

We had an early supper. And then my ma and my pa got into the car and drove away. Gee! The house seemed awfully quiet, so I was glad when Slats dropped in on his way to lodge.

"What's the matter with you and Betty Sharpe?" says he. "Why didn't she invite you to her party?"

"She just don't like me, I guess," says I.

"I suppose you know," says he, "that she invited me."

"Yes," says I. "I heard about it."

"Tail Light got a bid too," says he.

"Are you going?" says I.

"Not if she leaves you out," says he loyally.

"Aw, shucks!" says I. "You needn't stay at home on my account."

"I don't like her anyway," says he. "For she bites her fingernails. And when she sings she squeaks."

"But think of all the fun you'll have," says I. "And think of the eats."

"Is Friday going?" says he.

"He thinks he is," says I, laughing. "But I have a hunch that Betty will give him the cold shoulder."

"Why?" Slats spoke curiously.

"Oh, because."

Just before I locked up the house, to go over to our lodge room, a grocery boy came in with a big basket of onions. And do they smell! Slats and I couldn't even step over the basket without holding our noses.

"What are you doing?" says he. "Buying up onions for winter?"

"You'll find out," says I.

And then I laughed again.

Tail Light was out in front eating a banana.

"What's the longest word in the dictionary?" says he.

"Is it Constantinople?" says I.

"No," says he.

"Then what is it?" says I.

"Smiles," says he.

"That isn't very long," says I.

"I think it is," says he. "For it's a mile from s to s."

Slats gave a disgusted grunt.

"What shall we do with him, Trigger?" says he. "Wring his neck?"

"Let's save him till we get over to our lodge room," says I, "and give him a third degree."

But you can't scare that little runt.

"I like third degrees," says he, as he shoved the whole banana down his throat.

Friday was waiting for us in his back yard. And when we were all in the barn he locked the door behind us to keep out rubber-necks. Then we went upstairs to the haymow.

"Br-r-r!" shivered Friday. "I don't think I care to stay up here very long to-night."

"What are we going to do when winter comes?" says Slats.

"I guess we won't do anything," says I, "except sit around and wait for spring to come."

"That don't sound so good," says Slats.

"Maybe not," says I. "But it's a cinch we can't hold our meetings up here in the winter time. It's almost too cold to-night."

"I wish it was July," says Tail Light, in that hungry way of his. "Then we could have ice cream."

"Oh, shut up," says Slats. "All you think about is your stomach. Besides I'd rather have gumdrops."

"Who's going to pay for them?" says I.

"Haven't we got any money in the treasury?"

"Let's open the meeting," says I, "and find out."

So I got into my robe (for I'm the chief officer) and rapped for order.

"Somebody take up the password," says I.

"I can't," says Slats lazily. "For I've got a lame wrist."

"Let Tail Light do it," says Friday.

"Do what?" Tail Light raised his head.

"Take up the password," says Friday.

The little kid swelled up like a toad.

"Oh, yah?" says he. "Well, you just go ahead and take it up yourself, you big loafer. For I haven't forgotten how you bit my ear the last time I took it up."

"We'll omit the password," says I, "and hear the treasurer's report."

Friday had to get up then.

"All I see," says he, turning the leaves of his record book, "is empty pages."

"Do you mean to tell me," says Slats, "that we haven't got any money in the treasury?"

"I don't see any," says Friday. Then he shook the book. "And I don't hear any rattle."

"But what become of it?" says Slats.

"You must remember," says I, giving him a dig, "that we've still got a lot of our money tied up in mouse traps."

"Ouch!" says he, with a comical grin. "I don't like to hear about that."

"Tail Light owes us two bits," says Friday.

"Yah," yelped Tail Light, "and I'm goin' to keep on owin' it too. For I happen to know that the rest of you guys don't pay any dues. You try to make me pay it all."

"Aw, be a sport," says Friday.

"If I had two bits," says Tail Light, "I'd buy a rabbit that barks."

"A rabbit that barks?" says Slats. "What in heck are you talking about? Rabbits don't bark."

"Yes they do," declared Tail Light. "For the teacher told me so. I asked her what rabbits live on. And she said they eat cabbage and bark."

Friday took a long breath.

"I make a motion," says he, "and second it, that we check up on the intelligence of our members. And all those who can stick their brains through the eye of a needle get kicked out."

Tail Light was ready to fight now.

"All right," says he, with flashing eyes. "Go ahead and kick me out if you want to. And if you do I'll tell everybody what the password is. Yes, I will. I'll write it all over the side of the schoolhouse too. And I'll tell how you kiss

an old doctor book for a Bible and how you've got an old garbage can for an altar."

I spoke up then.

"I think," says I, "that we better let our membership stand as it is."

Tail Light turned and made a face at Friday.

"Yah, yah," says he. "Now I guess you'll keep your big mouth shut."

Slats jumped up then and started waving his arms around like a Fourth-of-July orator.

"Brother members," says he, "this is a deplorable situation."

Friday let on that he was going to faint.

"Quick!" says he, in a weak voice. "Someone fan me with a dictionary."

"Deplorable," says Slats, "means bad."

Friday straightened.

"Why didn't you say that in the first place," says he, "instead of scaring me to death?"

"The point is," says Slats—

"As the pin said to the needle," put in Friday.

"Shut up!" roared Slats. "I'm making a speech."

"All right," says Friday. "Go ahead and amuse yourself."

"The point is," Slats began again, "that we've got to do something about it."

"About what?" says Friday.

"The empty treasury," says Slats. "We've got to fill it up."

I saw what was coming. And I tried to head him off.

"Just a minute," says I, holding up my hand. "If you're going to tell us any more stuff about mouse traps—"

"Mouse traps are out," says Slats. "They're out for good. And ghosts are in."

Which, I think, is a good place to stop and go to bed.

To-morrow night I'll write down about Slats' ghost-making scheme. And probably by that time I'll have something to tell about the fried onions.

Friday is lying on my bed. He thinks I'm crazy to do so much writing. But I like it. And you can bet your shirt that I'm going to keep this diary out of his sight too!

He's hungry already, he says, for fried onions. But he won't be hungry for fried onions when I get through with him.

Oh, yes, I almost forgot to write down that I found another basket of onions on the back porch when I got home to-night. I guess the grocer made a mistake. But I think I can use both baskets.

Anyway, I'm going to try.

CHAPTER IV

THE COCKEYED GHOST

October 24—A lot of stuff happened to-day. But before I put it down I guess I better finish up about last night.

We were gathered in our lodge room in Friday's barn. And Slats was making a speech.

"I know," says he, "that my mouse-trap scheme was a flop. We didn't make a cent out of it. But this time I've got a real idea."

"Well," says Friday, "don't keep us in suspenders."

"What would you do," Slats then inquired, "if you met a cockeyed ghost in a dark alley?"

"Run," says Friday shortly.

"Of course," nodded Slats. "And that's exactly what a bank robber would do if he met a cockeyed ghost in a bank. So, if we want to fill up our lodge treasury, and get rich, all we've got to do is to make up a lot of cockeyed ghosts. We can easily rent them out to banks, to keep burglars away. And there's the old-maid market too. You know how old maids are. They're

scared to death to stay alone. And what old maid wouldn't be willing to pay ten dollars a month to have a nice gentle cockeyed ghost in the house? She might even get a husband that way. For if a man crawled through one of her windows, and the ghost scared him out of his senses, she could grab him and make him marry her."

Friday gave a whoop.

"The old maids' salvation," says he, "and the bankers' friend. There's a line for you."

Slats got out a pencil.

"I guess I'll write it down," says he. "For it'll sound swell in our advertising."

"And do you mean to tell me," says I, staring at him, "that you're actually going to make up a ghost?"

"Of course," says he. "And I'm going to put wheels in its head."

"I think you've got wheels in your own head," says I.

He was laughing now.

"Even if we don't get a chance to marry off some timid old maid," says he, "I think it will be fun to own a ghost."

"*And* how," says Friday, with enthusiasm.

"Can we take it to school," piped up Tail Light, "and scare the teacher?"

"I don't know about that," says Slats. "But I think we can take it over to the Vett house on

Hallowe'en, and scare the wits out of Betty Sharpe and her gang."

"How about Tony Crooker?" says I. "It would be fun to scare him."

There was some more talk about the ghost. And Slats told us how he was going to fix up a tin head for it that would rock back and forth.

"I got the idea from a toy," says he. "And I know how I can fix up an eye that will open and close—a great big eye, with stuff around it to shine in the dark. That's why I called it a cockeyed ghost."

"What are you going to do for arms and legs?" says Friday.

"I think I'll make them out of wood," says Slats.

"Can't you put the tin head on a long black board," says I, "and paint ribs on the board, like a skeleton?"

"That's an idea," says Slats.

So, when I got up and closed the lodge, it was agreed that we were to make the ghost just as soon as possible, so that we could start having fun with it.

Friday and I went to bed as soon as we got home.

"How are we going to wake up?" says he.

"Don't you worry," says I. "For you'll know when it's time to get up."

And he did too! For at seven o'clock this

morning there was the awfullest bangety-bang-bang-bang in the hall that you ever heard in all your life.

I don't dare fix up an alarm like that when my ma and my pa are at home. They think it's too noisy. But it's fun to do it when they go away. And when Friday got over being scared, I jumped up and showed him how it worked.

First, I said, I balanced a lot of pans on the top step. Then I fixed a string to the alarm clock. And when the alarm went off the pans all tumbled down the stairs.

"But wouldn't you wake up just the same," says he, "if you put the alarm clock under your pillow?"

"Of course," says I. "But who wants to monkey around with a silly old alarm like that? This is a *real* alarm."

"Do you know what I thought it was?" Friday laughed.

"What?" says I.

"I thought the whole German army was here."

That gave me an idea.

"Let's take the covers off my bed," says I, "and make a tent."

"What for?" says he.

"Well," says I, "I can pretend that I'm the American army. And you can get in the closet and be the German army."

"Hot dog!" says he.

So we got everything fixed up. And then we began to pitch pillows at each other as fast as we could.

Bang! Bang! Bang! Bang!

"Hurray for the Germans," yelled Friday, as he knocked me off the bed.

But I wasn't going to let a little old German army lick me. So I gave him a double-header.

"Hurray for the Yanks," says I.

Then, watching my chance, I heaved a heavy floor pillow at him. And what do you know if I didn't catch him with his long neck in the crack of the door. Gee! He almost got what the king of France got—meaning a hair cut under the chin.

"Quick!" he gurgled, falling over in a heap. "Get the Red Cross. For the German army is suffering with a broken neck."

Having won the battle, I then went downstairs to get breakfast. And when he got the bed fixed up he came down to help me.

"What the dickens! . ." says he, peeking through the back door. "Did you order some more onions?"

I took a look.

"Suffering cats!" says I. "That grocer must be crazy."

For there on the back porch was another bushel of onions!

"How many have you got altogether?" says Friday.

"Three bushels," says I.

"Boy!" says he. "We'll have to eat hard. For that's a bushel a day."

"Shall I cook you some for breakfast?" says I.

"I don't think I want any for breakfast," says he. "I'd rather have corn flakes and bananas. But I want a lot for dinner."

So I measured out a peck and started to slice them.

"We better do it now," says I. "For we won't have much time this noon."

"How long does it take onions to fry?" says he.

"Oh, a half hour at least," says I.

"Oh, boy!" says he, rubbing his stomach. "I can hardly wait."

"I don't suppose we'll need any potatoes," says I.

"Naw," says he. "Just onions."

Then he wiped the tears out of his eyes.

"Gosh!" says he. "These onions have got an awful strong smell."

"The stronger the better," says I.

But he didn't know what I meant!

Later I caught him fooling around with his wart in the bathroom. He was scrubbing it with my tooth brush. I don't think he washed his

other hand at all. And I know blamed well that he didn't wash the back of his neck. But he was awfully particular with that one hand.

And all the time, I suppose, he was thinking of Betty Sharpe, and how he'd give her another thrill with his pins. The poor sap!

It was lots colder this morning. And the sky had a queer leaden look. The newspapers said to look out for a blizzard. But it doesn't seem possible to me that we can have snow now—after all that hot weather.

My ma had told me that I could get anything I needed at the grocery store. So I stopped on the way to school to buy some gumdrops. And at the same time I told the grocer to quit sending me onions.

He acted surprised.

"How about that, Charley?" says he to one of the clerks. "Did you take three bushels of onions up to Trigger's house?"

"No," says the clerk. "Only one bushel."

"But I got three bushels," says I.

"Well," says the clerk, "you never got them from here."

The grocer put his hand on my shoulder.

"And you're sure," says he, "that you didn't order them from somebody else?"

"If I did," says I, "I'm crazy."

"I heard that your ma and pa have gone away," says he.

"Yes," I nodded.

"Are you doing your own cooking?" says he.

"Yes," I nodded again.

"Then," says he briskly, "you ought to have some nice chocolate cookies. Or maybe you'd like to have me send you up a couple of pies."

"The pies are all right," says I weakly. "And so are the cookies. But please don't send me any more onions."

Here another clerk came up.

"Have we got any onions to spare?" he inquired of the boss.

Onions! I figured I better stay and listen.

"Who wants 'em?" says the boss.

"The Greek in the corner store. Somebody keeps ordering onions in bushel lots, he says. And he's all out."

The boss gave me a sharp look.

"Have you been playing tricks on the Greek?" says he.

Gosh! I was so muddled up now that I didn't know beans.

"Forget about the onions," says I.

And away I ran, as fast as I could go.

Pretty soon Slats caught up with me.

"I got it all made," says he.

"What?" says I.

"Why, the head, of course."

I still couldn't figure out where those blamed onions came from.

"Have you been making a head?" says I, sort of absent-minded-like.

"Don't be dumb," says he. "You know very well that I've been making a head. And you know what I'm going to do with it too, when I get it finished."

"What?" says I.

"Why, I'm going to put it on the ghost, of course."

I sort of came down to earth then.

"I've got so many onions on my mind," says I, "that I forgot all about your cockeyed ghost."

He laughed.

"Boy!" says he, with dancing eyes. "I bet we have fun."

"How does it work?" says I, as we hoofed it down the street.

"Swell," says he.

"Have you got the body made too?" says I.

"All but the wheels," says he, "that we're going to pull it around on."

"I've got some wheels over to my house," says I.

"How big are they?" says he.

"Oh, about like that," I measured.

"Fine!" says he. "I'll get them this noon."

He had a physiology book under his arm. And stopping, he showed me the picture of a skeleton.

"I used that for a pattern," says he, "when I painted the ribs."

"Where have you got the ghost?" says I.

"Up in our attic," says he.

"If I get time this noon," says I, "I'm coming over to take a look at it."

Later I cornered Friday.

"Do I look crazy?" says I.

"Not any crazier than usual," he grinned.

I told him then about the extra onions.

"The Greek wouldn't have sent them up," says I, "if I hadn't ordered them. But if I did it, I was out of my mind."

"Three bushels of onions!" says Friday. "Oh, boy! Ain't that somethin'."

Then he ran across the school yard to talk to Betty. And just as I expected he got out his pins.

"Oh! . ." she squealed, in that silly way of hers. "Doesn't it hurt?"

"Poof!" says he. "I'm hard."

Her great big hero!

"I've got something for you," says she.

"What?" says he.

She held out a piece of fudge.

"I made it myself," says she.

Friday took the fudge and ate it.

"Um-yum-yum," says he.

"You can have more," says Betty, in that

come-along way of hers, "if you stop and get me after dinner."

"I suppose I ought to walk to school with Trigger," says Friday. "For I'm staying at his house. But I'll walk with you, if you want me to."

"You're *so* nice," purred Betty.

And you should have seen the soft look she gave him! Oof! I thought I'd heave up my breakfast.

Friday fairly beamed.

"I think you're nice too," says he.

"What kind of candy do you like the best?" says she. "Chocolate or vanilla?"

"Both," says he.

She giggled.

"Silly!" says she. "You can't like both the best."

"I like anything the best," says he gallantly, "that *you* make."

It was an awful case. And as I turned my back on them I figured that I couldn't get the fried onions into him any too soon. Silly acting as he was, I had to save him. For he was my chum.

And now I'm going to tell you about another bright one that Tail Light pulled to-day in school and quit. For Friday is yapping at me to come to bed with him.

During history class the teacher said to Tail Light: "How many wars has the United States had?" "Five," says he promptly. "Enumerate them," says she. And he says: "One, two, three, four, five."

Gosh! I thought I'd bust.

CHAPTER V

MORE ONIONS

October 25—Boy! I've got a lot to write down to-night. And I'm going to put it all down if I have to sit here till midnight. For, as my Uncle Ben says, the best time to write down stuff like this is when it happens. If you put it off you kind of forget about it.

The first thing I knew this morning was when the alarm went off. Bangety-bangety-bangety-BANG! And with the last bang the tin wash tub and all the other truck that I had balanced at the head of the stairs landed kerplunk in the middle of the lower hall.

"It's time to get up," I told Friday.

But he didn't say anything.

"What's the matter?" says I, giving him a poke in the ribs. "Why don't you get up?"

"I don't feel good," says he.

"Aren't we going to have another battle this morning?" says I.

"No," says he weakly. "The Germans don't feel like fighting this morning."

I peeked out of the window.

"Look!" I cried, giving him another poke. "There's frost all over the trees."

"I don't care," says he.

"Let's get up," says I quickly, "and gather walnuts."

"Walnuts don't interest me now," says he.

"What's the matter?" says I. "Didn't you get enough fried onions last night?"

He started to gag.

"Don't," says he weakly.

"Don't what?" says I.

"Don't say anything more about fried onions," says he.

"Well, if you're tired of *fried* onions," says I, "let's boil 'em for a change."

"No, no," says he desperately.

"No, no, what?" says I.

"I don't want any fried onions or boiled onions or any other kind of onions."

"But we can't let all those onions go to waste," says I.

"Have a heart," says he. "Please talk about something else."

"All right," says I cheerfully. "Let's talk about your wart."

"I don't want to talk about my wart either," says he.

"Why not?" says I.

"Oh," says he, kind of evasive-like, "I—I just don't care about warts any more."

Yes, and I knew why too! Instead of hanging around him as usual, Betty wouldn't even walk on the same side of the street with him. And it was worrying him.

"Well," says I, "it won't be long till Hallowe'en. And then the big party, huh?"

He was acting kind of sour now.

"I wish you'd talk about something that I want to talk about," says he.

"Good night nurse!" says I. "You don't want to talk about fried onions and you don't want to talk about warts and you don't want to talk about Hallowe'en. What *do* you want to talk about?" says I craftily. "Betty Sharpe?"

That made him look sourer than ever.

"There you go," he snorted.

"Evidently," says I, with a sly look at him, "you don't want to talk about her either."

"I hate her," says he viciously.

I had a grin inside of me a mile wide.

"Since when?" says I.

"Since yesterday noon," says he.

"That's when we had our first meal of fried onions," says I. "And did we ever put 'em away! Oh, boy! I bet you ate a peck yourself."

"SHUT UP!" he bellowed. "I don't want to talk about fried onions. And I don't want to talk about Betty Sharpe either."

"I notice," says I slyly, "that she changed her seat."

"Humph!" says he.

"She used to sit in front of you," says I. "And now she sits on the other side of the schoolroom, where the ventilator is."

"I wish you'd dry up," says he crossly.

But I was having fun.

"Where did you go yesterday noon," I kept on, "when I was washing the dishes?"

"None of your business," he growled.

"I bet you walked to school with her," says I.

"I bet I didn't," he snapped back at me.

"Anyway," says I, "I bet you tried to."

"Humph!" says he again.

"What are we going to have for dinner?" says I.

He blew up then.

"All right!" he yelled, bouncing around on the bed like a crazy baboon. "Go ahead and say it. FRIED ONIONS! FRIED ONIONS! FRIED ONIONS! All you know how to cook is FRIED ONIONS!"

"I can boil 'em too," says I.

Then down he went under the covers.

"Oh, shut up!" says he, turning his back on me. "You make me sick."

I got up and dangled my legs over the edge of the bed.

"Well," says I, with a big yawn, "do we or don't we?"

"Do we or don't we what?" he growled.

"Have fried onions for breakfast?"

He jumped up then and grabbed a pillow.

"So you want to fight, huh?" he roared. "All right, you white-livered Yank. I'll show you how to fight." And taking after me, like a regular fury, he chased me clean down the stairs.

There was a terrible racket in the lower hall as we tumbled around among the pans. And then, just when we were going it the hardest, with him swatting me with a pillow and me yelling bloody-murder, the front doorbell rang.

"Holy smoke," I squealed. "I'm half naked."

And up the stairs I went like a shot.

Friday took a peek through the front door.

"What the dickens! . ." says he, sort of wondering-like. "It's that Greek."

"Who?" says I, from the head of the stairs.

"The onion guy," says he.

My knees began to bow out.

"Has he got more onions?" says I weakly.

"Two baskets," says Friday.

And then he laughed to beat the cars. He thought it was funny, I guess, because I was getting so many onions. But it wasn't funny to me.

I made a grab for my pants.

"Hold him," I yelled down the stairs, "till I get there."

But Friday couldn't find the door key. And by the time I got to the door, with my pants on hind-side-foremost, the Greek was gone.

Friday was still laughing.

"Why don't you have him bring you some sweet potatoes for a change?" says he. "Or a truck load of pumpkins."

"Suffering cats!" I squawked, as I walked around the filled baskets. "I never ordered those onions. He's crazy."

"Shall we leave them out here on the front porch?" says Friday.

"Maybe we better take them inside," says I dizzily.

So we carried them in the house and put them in the parlor.

Friday let on that he was speaking a piece.

"Onions to the right of us," says he, with a big gesture, "and onions to the left of us. Thus, into the valley of death, rode the six hundred."

"What shall I do?" says I weakly. "Send the onions back, or wait till my pa gets home?"

"That Greek looks awful hard," says Friday, with a wise wag of his head.

"Don't I know it?" says I.

"That's his third wife too," says Friday.

"I don't care about his wife," says I. "It's the onions that I'm thinking about."

"Of course," says Friday, with another wise wag, "his first two wives *may* have died natural. But you never can tell."

"I guess I'll wait till my pa gets home," says I hastily.

"Anyway," says Friday, "the house isn't half filled up yet. So why worry about it? You're all right as long as you've got room to move around."

"Do you think he's liable to come back with more onions?" says I weakly.

"That all depends on how crazy he is," says Friday. "If he's just a little touched, he may stop with five bushels. But if he's got it bad, he may bring you a whole train load."

"Gee-miny crickets!" says I. "I'm going to keep away from that bird."

"He must like you," grinned Friday. "Or he wouldn't bring you all these nice onions."

"*Like* me?" I squawked. "He doesn't even know me. And that's the funny part. I never bought anything in his store. So why should he pick on *me?*"

Friday shrugged.

"I've heard," says he, "that Greeks are awful when they go crazy. So I wouldn't cross him if I were you."

"Don't worry," says I quickly. "I don't intend to cross him. And what's more I don't

intend even to go near him till my pa gets home."

We were so full of onions ourselves that we couldn't smell them. But the neighbors could. And pretty soon Miss Tidy Potts came over and tapped on the back door.

I don't like her. For she gets mad if we chase her cat. And is she ever touchy about that old grapevine of hers. Humph! To hear her yell at us, when we stop to take a grape or two, you'd think that they were worth a million dollars a pound.

She doesn't have a husband like the other women in the neighborhood. And the house that she lives in has a cupola on the roof. The neighbors say she sits up there all day long with a telescope. And I believe it too. For she knows everything that goes on in the neighborhood.

She did a lot of coughing and gagging when I let her in.

"I knew it," says she, in her sharp gabby way.

"What?" says I, as I made a jump for the smoking toaster.

"That you were over here frying onions," says she.

"What of it?" says I.

"I smelt them yesterday noon," says she. "And I smelt them all night long."

I sniffed.

"That's funny," says I. "For I can't smell them."

Friday is a big monkey. And when he heard her talking that way he dragged one of the onion baskets into the middle of the kitchen floor.

"We've got the rest of them in the parlor," says he.

"The rest of what?" says Miss Potts.

"Why, the rest of our onions, of course," says he.

"Goodness gracious!" says she. "If you're going to cook all those onions I think I'll go to Florida."

"We've got five baskets altogether," Friday bragged.

She acted as though she was having trouble with her voice.

"Five baskets!" she repeated weakly. And then she turned to me. "Does your ma know," says she, "that you're stinking up the whole house with fried onions?"

"She told me," says I, as I flipped a pancake over, "that I could cook anything I wanted to." Then I handed Friday a big dish pan. "Go get some for dinner," says I. "And heap it up."

"O-k," says he, starting off.

Miss Potts let out her neck.

"Where are you going?" says she.

"In the parlor," says Friday, "to get some onions. For we keep the red ones in there. These

white ones," he pointed to the basket in the middle of the kitchen floor, "are kind of weak. And we need lots of nourishment to-day."

She got up then and went home. And pretty soon I saw her flying from house to house. She was telling the neighbors that we had onions in the parlor. And when Friday and I started for school, after a hearty meal of pancakes, toast and fried bacon, we could see a lot of heads peeking at us.

The neighbors think we're crazy, I guess. But I should worry.

Like Friday, I was all filled up on fried onions. But we wanted to have some more fun with Miss Potts. So, at noon, we fried another panful just to make a stink. And to make sure that she wouldn't miss it, we opened all the doors and windows, sort of fanning the smell outside.

"What are we going to do with them?" says Friday, when we took the onions off the hot fire.

"Let's put them on the back porch," I gagged.

"How about frying another panful," says he, "for the front porch?"

"That's an idea," says I. "And this time burn 'em till they're black. For they smell worse that way."

Slats came over then on the tear.

"Quick!" he panted. "Give me the camphor bottle."

"What's the matter?" says I. "Have you got a headache?"

"It's my ma," says he. "She went up in the attic this noon to put some moth balls in my pa's summer underwear. And when my cockeyed ghost started to roll toward her, she fainted dead away. My pa's up there now fanning her."

I had to smell of several bottles before I got the right one. And then I followed Slats home.

Tail Light was blubbering on the back steps.

"Don't cry," says I, putting an arm around him. "She won't die."

"I wasn't crying over her," he blubbered. "I just dropped my sucker in the cistern."

Suffering cats!

"Get out of my way," says I, giving him a shove. And then I went up the attic stairs lickety-cut.

Just as I got there Mrs. Beale raised herself and looked around. Then, as she caught sight of the cockeyed ghost, she squealed so loud that I thought the roof would crack.

Mr. Beale gave the ghost a kick.

"Get that darn thing out of here," says he crossly.

So, while he jiggled the camphor bottle

around, Slats and I took the ghost downstairs and hid it in Friday's barn.

Boy! It sure is a peachy ghost. And I don't blame Mrs. Beale for fainting when she saw it. For it looks just like a skeleton. Slats has it fixed up so that he can jiggle the arms. He does it with a string. And he has another string for pulling the ghost around.

Tail Light didn't get to school this afternoon till two o'clock. And when the teacher jumped on him for being tardy, he said that he had to stay at home to put a mustard plaster on his pa's back.

"What's the matter with your pa?" Miss Squeeze spoke sympathetically. "Is he suffering with rheumatism?"

"No," says Tail Light, as he slid into his seat. "He started down the attic stairs with my ma on his back, and skidded."

"But surely," says the teacher, "it didn't take you a whole hour to put a mustard plaster on his back."

"It stuck to my hands," says Tail Light. "I couldn't get it off. That's what took me so long."

Gosh! If the part that Mr. Beale has got on his back sticks like that, I feel sorry for him. Maybe he'll have to leave it stay there till it wears off, like an old undershirt.

He isn't half as big as his wife. So I think he

was kind of dumb to carry her down the attic stairs. He might have known that he'd strain his back. But when a man gets excited that way he's liable to do almost anything.

I've got a lot more to write down about the cockeyed ghost. For we took it over to the old Vett house to-night and put it under our walnut tree. But I think I'll stop now and get a dish of my ma's beans, to sort of pep me up. Friday and I made an awful hole in the beans this noon. And we ate some more to-night. But there's plenty left. We fried some more onions too. But we didn't eat them. We just spread them around the yard.

Gee! The neighbors are mad as the dickens. They kind of peeked at us this morning, when we started for school. But now they glare at us. And Miss Potts glares the worst of all. She won't even let her cat out of the house, for fear that it will come home with an onion smell on its feet, like some of the other cats and dogs that have been hanging around our back door to-day.

And now for the beans.

CHAPTER VI

AT THE OLD VETT HOUSE

October 25 *(Continued)*—Well, that's the end of my ma's baked beans. I ate 'em all. I tucked away a couple of fat cheese sandwiches too, and a big dill pickle. So now I feel like writing for another two or three hours.

Friday will be mad as hops, I suppose, when he finds out that I had a lunch in the middle of the night. For he hates to miss anything like that. And does he ever look funny as he lays there in my bed. For he has a rag doll in his arms. I put it there, just for fun, when I came upstairs. And to-morrow morning, when he wakes up, I'm going to tell him that he called it Betty in his sleep, and kissed it on the nose.

He'll probably chase me all over the house in my shirt-tail. But I should worry. I'm going to have some fun with him anyway.

Good old Friday! He sure is a pal worth having all right, even if he does gurgle in his sleep like an old cracked sewer. And I'm glad now that I jerked him out of Betty Sharpe's

clutches. The scheming little snip! She thought she could twist him around her finger. But I saved him!

She hasn't told him yet that she wants her invitation back. But I think she will if he rubs against our onion pan a few more times.

And the funny part is that he actually told her himself, when he stopped to get her yesterday noon, that he had been eating onions. Um-yum-yum, he said. They sure were bully. I was right behind him, and heard it. Betty was as sweet as sugar pie till he said that. And then she got as frosty as a north-pole icicle.

No old fried onions for her!

Hurrying to school, with her hand to her nose, she got permission to change her seat. And then, when I breezed in, three or four more girls changed their seats. I thought it was funny myself. But poor Friday was all upset about it.

He was thinking of his wart, I guess. And he hated to lose his audience. But he's all right now. And I actually believe that he'd laugh himself if he knew the truth about that fried-onion scheme of mine.

But I guess I better quit talking about the fried onions and get back to my story.

When school was out to-night Friday and I tried to start our furnace. For the whole house was like an ice box. But all of the stuff that we put through the fuel door tumbled into the ash

pan. And when Friday poked his head in the fuel door, to see what was wrong with the grate, he got stuck.

Gee! I thought for a minute or two, as he twisted his neck this way and that way, that we'd have to saw the furnace apart to get him out. But he finally wiggled loose. And did I ever laugh. For he was as black as a nigger.

We found out later on that there isn't any grate in the furnace. My pa took the grate out, I guess, and forgot to put it back. So all we've got to-night to keep us warm is a little oil stove. I have it standing beside me as I sit here at my writing desk. And the heat that I get sure feels good. But I like the furnace heat the best.

A lot of people in Crocketville still use stoves to heat with. And that's what we used at our house until a few years ago. But my ma got tired of stuffing stoves. They kept the house dirty all the time, she said. So, to please her, my pa put the stoves away in the attic and bought a furnace. But we've still got the stove-pipe holes in the chimney. And if it gets much colder around here I may lug one of the stoves downstairs and set it up. Of course, I couldn't begin to budge the big parlor heater that I used to burn myself on when I was a baby. It weighs a ton, I guess. But if I remember right there's a little stove up there that my ma used in the

company bedroom. I've often seen her set it up herself. So I guess that Friday and I could manage it all right.

Friday made an awful mess in the bathroom when he was cleaning up. He got soot all over the tub and on the towels and everything else. Then he jawed at me like sixty because he didn't have any hot water. Gee! When I got a look at him I told him that he better heat himself some water on the kitchen stove and do the job over again. For he was the spottiest thing that I ever set eyes on. If he ever went down town looking like that, I said, some circus man would put him in a cage and start making a show of him.

Later on, when he got cleaned up right, he and I went over to the old Vett house to pick up walnuts. But all we found was a dozen or two. And while we were cracking them under the tree the Crooker gang came into sight.

Friday and I knew blamed well what would happen to us if they caught us there. For they had us out-numbered more than two to one. So we wisely ducked into the bushes, hoping that they'd go on by without seeing us.

But Tony in particular likes to dawdle along. And while pitching rocks into the bushes, he got his eyes on the big walnut tree.

"Holy smoke!" says he. "Look at the nuts on that tree. It's loaded."

"Yes," says Budge Turner, "and you better leave them alone too."

Tony gave a grunt.

"What's eatin' *you?*" says he.

"It's old Vett's tree," says Budge. "And you know what *he* is. He's an old crab. He's cuckoo too. And if he sees you in there he'll run you ragged."

"Go tell that to your aunt's parrot," says Tony, with a lordly swing of his shoulders.

"Just the same," says Budge, "*I* won't go in."

"All right then," says Tony, "stay out, if you want to. Noboby cares. But you won't get any of the nuts. Just remember that."

"You'll be sorry," says Budge, "if old Vett catches you."

Tony pushed out his chest.

"Listen, unconscious," says he. "That bird couldn't catch me if he had glue on his fingers."

"You're a good runner all right," says Budge, sort of sneering-like, "if someone like Trigger Berg takes after you. But if Dr. Vett took after you, I bet you'd drop dead."

Tony almost busted himself laughing.

"Haw, haw, haw!" he roared. "Another fairy tale. Now let's hear the one about Cinderella."

Friday gave me a nudge.

"What do you want?" says I, in a low voice.

"Kick the ground with your heels," says he.

"What for?" says I.

"To make Tony think it's old Vett coming."

So I gave the ground a couple of husky kicks. And away went Tony like a scared rabbit.

"I didn't want those old nuts anyway," says he, stopping on the other side of the street to look back.

"I know what we can do," says Will Madden.

"What?" says Tony.

"Let's come back to-night," says Will, "when the old man's in bed."

"Not me," says Budge promptly.

"Why not?" says Will.

"He's cuckoo, I tell you. And if he ever caught you in his yard he'd cut your gizzards out."

"I don't think he's half as cuckoo as he looks," says Tony.

"What's the matter with him?" says Charley Kavenaugh. "Does he take too much of his own medicine?"

"He's got ghosts on the brain," says Tony.

"Ghosts on the brain?" says Will, sort of puzzled-like. "What's that?—a new kind of disease?"

"He thinks that the world is full of ghosts that you can't see," says Tony.

"And does he keep them over there in his big yard?" says Charley.

"He says they're every place," says Tony.

"And he expects to see them too when he gets the right kind of a lamp fixed up."

"Who told you so?" says Charley.

"Oh," says Tony, "I heard my pa talking about it."

Then he turned to the rest of his outfit.

"Well," says he, "how many of you are in favor of coming back to-night?"

"Me," says Will.

"Me too," says the other Madden kid.

Tony looked at Budge.

"How about you, yellow-back? Are you still suffering with weak knees?"

"Oh," says Budge, kind of reluctant-like, "I'll come if the rest of you do. But I don't like it."

"There's five of us altogether," says Tony. "So we ought to get the nuts in a jiffy, if we work fast."

"But what if we get caught?" says Budge.

Tony snorted.

"*You* would say that," says he, sort of disgusted-like.

"Just the same," says Budge, "I don't want to go to jail for stealing walnuts."

They passed on then. And when they were out of sight Friday and I got up.

"Well," says he, with a funny little laugh, "I guess that's one time when it paid us to have sharp ears."

"Let's get some rocks," says I, "and hide them here in the bushes."

"What for?" says he.

"Why, for to-night, of course."

"But why fight with rocks," says he, with another jolly laugh, "when we've got a cock-eyed ghost?"

"Crickets!" says I. "I never thought about the ghost. But I bet we can hide it here in the bushes."

"Easy," says Friday. "And we'll keep it here till Tony gets the nuts picked up. Then we'll give him the scare of his life."

It was a swell scheme, all right. And if we had the big yard to ourselves everything would be lovely. On the other hand if Dr. Vett came out with a club, it wouldn't be so hot for us.

I hadn't thought of it before. But the walnuts *were* on his land. And if we took them, without his consent, he *could* put us in jail, just as Budge Turner had said.

"Let's find out," says I, "if anybody here wants the nuts."

"O-k," says Friday. And crossing the yard we rapped on the back door.

The Vett house is made of wood, with high narrow windows on all sides and a lot of fancy sawed-out stuff up under the eaves. With its wings and cupolas, it was a pretty swell place years ago. But it looks kind of shabby now. And

the jungle-like stuff that grows around it makes it look kind of lonely and spooky-like. Or maybe it looked spooky to me because of the stories that I had heard about one of its owners.

"Who are we going to talk to?" says Friday, as we waited on the doorsteps.

"I think we had better talk to Mrs. Clarkey," says I.

And then, as the door opened noiselessly, we found ourselves looking into the gimlet eyes of a tall raw-boned servant in a blue calico dress.

"What do you want?" says she sharply.

I could see right off that she didn't like small boys. And I kind of had the feeling too, as I took another look at her expressionless chiseled face and tightly-drawn hair, that she had been peeking at us through the kitchen windows.

She looked like the peeking kind.

"Well," she followed up, in the same harsh voice, "if you've got something to say, go on and say it. Don't keep staring at me."

"We'd like to see Mrs. Clarkey," says I.

"Mrs. Clarkey isn't in the habit," says she, "of receiving guests at the back door."

Friday was grinning now.

"Well," says he, "I suppose we *can* go around to the front door, if you insist on it."

"I don't think that Mrs. Clarkey would care to see you at either door," we were told.

"Who is it, Maggie?" a voice spoke in the

background. And then Mrs. Clarkey herself waddled into sight.

"It's a couple of town boys," the servant spoke crustily. "They've been hanging around the yard. And I tried to get rid of them. But they insisted on seeing you."

Mrs. Clarkey laughed in her jolly way when she got her eyes on me.

"I think I know what *you* want," says she. "It's the invitation that I promised you."

I shook my head.

"I don't care very much about the invitation," says I. "But if you don't mind, Friday and I would like to pick up some walnuts in your yard."

"Walnuts?" she repeated wonderingly. "I didn't know we had any."

"There's a big tree over there," I pointed.

"Yes," put in the servant, "and as soon as the walnuts fall to the ground I expect to pick them up myself."

I could see that Mrs. Clarkey didn't like that. For an irritated look crossed her face.

"Nonsense," she spoke sharply. "You know very well, Maggie, that you'll never bother with those walnuts. So let the boys take them, if they want to."

Gee! I sure was tickled to hear that. But I didn't like the look that the servant gave the other woman behind her back. It was a sort of

snake-like daggery look. Friday and I spoke of it afterwards.

Mrs. Clarkey laughed when she learned that we were going to fix up a ghost under the walnut tree. And oddly the servant laughed too. But it was a funny rasping laugh. I didn't like it. And I was glad when she went inside and closed the door.

"Well," says Mrs. Clarkey, as she started down the path with us, "how did you boys come out with Betty?"

"Friday got an invitation from her," says I. "But she hasn't any time for me."

"What's her reason for snubbing you?"

"She's sore," says I, "because I told her to wipe her nose."

That brought a laugh.

"Well," says Mrs. Clarkey, "if that's all she has against you, I dare say that I can get the desired invitation for you."

"I don't think I'd care to come over here and play games," says I, "even if Betty invited me. But I'll be glad to help you, if you need me."

"That's nice of you, Trigger. And I'm going to take advantage of your offer too. So consider yourself engaged for the evening."

"How about me?" Friday spoke quickly.

"But I thought you already had an invitation."

"Aw, shucks!" says Friday. "I don't want

to hang around the parlor without Trigger. Let me help you in the kitchen, Mrs. Clarkey."

"Well," came the jolly laugh, "I don't want to burden Maggie with unsolicited help. But if that's your wish, I'll try and find suitable work for both of you."

"What makes that servant of yours look so cross?" Friday then inquired.

Mrs. Clarkey sighed.

"Poor Mrs. Dorn! She has led a hard life, I guess. Disappointments have soured her. But, even so, she has many admirable traits. And even if I were tempted to replace her, I doubt if my brother would let her go. For their beliefs are very much alike. So naturally they enjoy each other's society."

"She moves around like a shadow," says Friday.

"Yes, I've noticed that. And oddly she can't bear the sound of a creaking hinge. So she keeps our door hinges well oiled."

"I think I'd want the door hinges to creak a little bit," says Friday, "if I had her around me."

"What do you mean?" Mrs. Clarkey spoke quickly.

"Oh, nothing much," Friday shrugged.

Like me, he thought that the servant was a sneak. But he didn't like to come right out and say so.

Stopping, at the end of the path, Mrs. Clarkey looked up at the leaden sky.

"We'll probably find snow on the ground," says she, "when we wake up to-morrow morning."

"I hope so," says Friday. "For to-morrow's Saturday. And if it snows we can build a fort and have a big snowball battle."

The servant was watching us through the kitchen window. But she stepped back out of sight when Friday and I started for home.

Which brings me to another stopping place. This time, I guess, I'll make myself some strong cocoa. And then I'll tell you about the stove-poker guy.

CHAPTER VII

THE MAN WITH THE BLACK WHISKERS

October 25 *(Continued)*—The snow that everybody has been talking about for the past two days has come. I can see it on the window sills of my bedroom. And from the way the wind is blowing I bet we have a lot of bully big drifts to-morrow morning. Gee! I sure am glad that to-morrow is Saturday. For now Friday and I can play in the snow all day long.

I kind of wish though that the wind didn't howl that way. For after what Mrs. Clarkey told us to-night, I feel kind of shivery. And I have the crazy feeling at times as the wind goes "Oo-o-o! Oo-o-o! Oo-o-o!" that there's a ghost out there trying to get in. Of course, Mrs. Clarkey made it perfectly plain to us that *she* didn't believe in ghosts herself. Yet she admitted that the light went out that night in the tunnel. And she said herself that something came up under the sheet. So it *could* have been a ghost.

And all the time she was telling us that stuff,

with the wind pounding against the weathered sides of the old house, and the tree-tops tossing back and forth, I had the feeling that the gimlet-eyed servant was standing outside the door listening. There's something mighty queer going on in that house. I can't figure it out. But it's something with ghosts mixed up in it. I'm dead sure of that.

Take Mrs. Dorn for instance. She'd pass for a ghost herself, if you found her wandering around in a cemetery. And there's Dr. Vett, with his piercing eyes and restless ways. He and the housekeeper, we were told, have the same kind of ideas. And that means that they both believe in ghosts.

But what do they do when they're together? Do they actually make ghosts show up? Boy! I sure would like to be a little mouse in the corner some time when they are doing their stuff in the doctor's laboratory.

I think they keep a lot of stuff from Mrs. Clarkey. But she knows enough to keep her worried. She just as much as told us so to-night. The gloom of the big house, she said, often drove her into a panic. And it was to get her mind settled on lighter happier things that she finally consented to let Betty hold her party there.

Oh, yes! I almost forgot to write down about the fancy post card that I got to-day from my

ma. She and my pa were having a swell time in Chicago, she said. And she told me that she was going to bring me something nice. I hope it's a rifle. For I know where I can shoot some dandy fat squirrels.

Before she gets home I'm going to sweep the house from top to bottom. I'm going to air it out too. For she wouldn't like it if she came back and found it full of onion smells. So I guess we'll have to put the onion pan away. Which, of course, will be a big relief to Miss Tidy Potts. Still, I suppose we *could* fry a few onions outside in the yard, if the wind was blowing in the right direction. That would give her something more to talk about. And, bu-lieve me, she's been talking plenty during the past two days. I happened to get on the telephone line with her this morning. She was passing out the usual line of gab with one of the neighbors. And I heard her say: "But it's *so,* I tell you. I actually saw them myself. Two baskets of red onions, mind you—two bushel baskets—sitting right there beside the piano." And then the other woman says: "How ridiculous! Onions in the parlor! How *perfectly* ridiculous!" And then Miss Potts says: "I'd be afraid to tell you how many onions they've fried—you'd think I was trying to exaggerate. But it must have been pecks at the very least. For the whole neighborhood smells like a skunk's nest." And

then the other woman says: "But where's Mrs. Berg? Why don't she put a stop to it?" And then Miss Potts says: "That's the point exactly. Why *don't* mothers with boys like that stay at home and take care of them? But, no! Off she goes to Chicago to have a good time. Leave it to *her!* I don't know whether she's jealous of her husband or not. But she never lets him get out of her sight. Now, if *I* had a husband—"

Which, I figured, was a good place to choke her off. So I went "Boo-o-o!" into the telephone, and hung up.

Nothing ever pleases her. If I had wings, like an angel, I bet she'd kick because I dropped feathers in her yard.

Now I'll tell what happened early in the evening. And then I'll tell what happened later on at Mrs. Clarkey's house. It's pretty late. And I suppose I should be in bed with Friday. But I want to write down as much as I can.

Friday and I had soup for supper. We opened two cans. We had bananas too, and dried-beef sandwiches. He made the sandwiches while I warmed the soup. And when the soup kettle and the sandwich dish were empty, we locked ourselves out of the house and hurried over to Slats' house.

"How's your ma?" says I, when he let us in the front door.

He took a peek up the stairs.

"Oh," says he hastily, "she's all right. But for Pete's sake don't say anything to pa. For he's grouchier than the dickens."

"What's the matter with him?" says I. "Has he got another pain in his back?"

"It isn't the pain this time," says Slats. "It's that dumb mustard plaster that Tail Light mixed up. One side of the plaster is stuck to my pa's back. And the other side is stuck to the mattress. So the only way we can move him is to carry the mattress around."

Later we gave old Bumfuzzle (that's our cockeyed ghost) a good try-out in Friday's barn. And then we loaded the ghost onto an express wagon, together with six nut sacks, and started for the Vett house.

"What are we going to do," says Slats, "if Tony and his gang are there already?"

"Don't worry," says I. "They won't be there yet. For they're too scared of bumping into old Vett."

Slats gave a queer laugh.

"I don't think I'd care to bump into that bird myself—not in the dark."

"The Crookers are going to wait till he goes to bed," says I.

"Then they may have to wait a long time," says Slats. "For I've heard that he often fiddles around all night in that laboratory of his."

"What does he do up there anyway?" says I curiously.

"I've been told," says Slats, "that he's working on some kind of a lamp."

"That's what Tony Crooker said," I nodded. "But I don't understand it."

"He thinks," says Slats, "that the world is full of invisible ghosts—only *he* calls 'em spirits. And he's got the idea in his head that if he can turn the right kind of a light ray on them, to give them a different color, he can make them show up."

"That sounds like a lot of boloney to me," says I.

"I suppose," says Slats, "that a lot of people said the same thing about that French woman when she was making up her radium dope. But she did it. So maybe Dr. Vett will be just as successful. You never can tell."

"But where does that chisel-faced woman come in?" says I. "Is she making a ghost lamp too?"

"Evidently," says Slats, "she and Dr. Vett talk it over between them."

Things were jumping around inside of my head.

"Yes," says I, "and it may be that she and Dr. Vett are working on something that nobody outside of themselves knows anything about. That ghost-lamp talk may be just a blind."

"What do you mean?" says Slats quickly.

I told him then about the oiled hinges.

"People don't do stuff like that," says I, "without a reason. And it's a cinch that she and Dr. Vett didn't have to do it to talk about a ghost lamp."

"I never saw her but once," Slats spoke thoughtfully. "She was down town buying some turnips. But I saw then that she was blamed queer."

"Anybody would be queer," says I, "who believed in ghosts."

Slats laughed.

"Don't you believe in ghosts, Trigger?"

"Not so you can notice it," says I.

"But what becomes of all the dead people?" says he.

"They just die," says I. "And that's the end of them."

"How about their spirit?" says he.

"Their spirit goes to heaven," says I.

"And where's heaven?" says he.

"Up in the sky," says I.

"You can't prove that," says he.

"Can't prove what?" says I.

"That heaven is up in the sky."

"How about the angels?" says I. "You don't see them roosting in the treetops or chasing gophers around. They're always up in the sky. So that's where heaven is. Anyway," I added

convincingly, "if heaven wasn't up in the sky, angels wouldn't have wings."

"Dr. Vett thinks that the spirits of dead people stay right here on earth. And each spirit has a shape. For instance, if I was to die, my spirit would look just like me. It would have the same kind of a nose and the same kind of ears and everything."

"*Some* spirit," says I.

"I'm not bragging about it," says he. "I'm just telling you."

"But if you were a spirit," says I, "and you looked just like you do now, why couldn't I see you?"

"Because I'd have a different color—one that you never saw before, or any other human being."

"I bet you made that up," says I.

"No, Trigger. Honest. That's what Dr. Vett thinks."

Friday was up in front pulling the cart.

"What are you guys talking about back there?" says he.

"Ghosts," says Slats.

"All right then," says Friday, "if you know so much about ghosts, help me unload this one and get it set up."

"O-k," says Slats, hurrying forward.

It was good and dark now. But we could see old Bumfuzzle's ribs just as plain as anything.

For Slats had touched them up with phosphorus. He had the big eye fixed up too. And the way it opened and closed, when the tin head rocked back and forth, was enough to scare the wits out of anybody.

Putting a key in the back of the tin head, Slats wound it up tight. Then he touched it off.

"Click-clack! Click-clack! Click-clack!" went the wabbling head. "Click-clack! Click-clack!"

"Suffering cats!" says Friday. "It sounds just like an old woman gnashing her false teeth."

"That's the way I want it to sound," says Slats.

"And did you make all those wheels yourself?" says I.

He laughed.

"You ought to know, Trigger, that I couldn't do that."

"What is it?" I followed up. "A whole clock?"

"It's the inside of an old toy," says he. "I just took out the springwork and rigged it up. It wasn't hard."

We could hear the wind howling in the treetops. And satisfied that the Crookers would soon show up, we put old Rumfuzzle in the bushes and wound him up.

"But how do you start him to wabbling?" I asked Slats.

"It's all done with the main string," says he. "When I pull it tight it releases a catch. And then, of course, the head keeps on wabbling till it runs down."

When everything was fixed up we hid in the bushes. And pretty soon, just as we expected, we heard guarded voices.

"Leave the cart here," says Tony Crooker. "That's it—throw the bags over the fence. Now spread out and keep an eye on the house. I'll climb the tree. And as soon as I get the nuts shook down I'll hoot three times like an old owl. Or, if old Vett comes out, you fellows can do the hooting."

"If he comes at me," says Budge, "I won't be able to hoot."

"What have you got in your mouth?" says Tony.

"My teeth," says Budge.

"Well, for heaven's sake keep them up where they belong and quit rattling them that way."

They were all on the inside of the fence now. And though we couldn't see them we could hear them spreading out. Then Tony shinned up the tree.

He did a lot of grunting as he climbed from limb to limb. And every time he shook the tree there was a shower of nuts. *Our* nuts! Gee! It was hard work for me to keep from giggling. And once I did let out a muffled squeak. But

faithful old Tony was too busy shaking down nuts for us to hear a little sound like that."

"There!" he muttered to himself, in the top of the tree. "I guess that's all."

And climbing down, he signaled for the others to come in.

They had a couple of flashlights. And fixing these, so the light spread out on the ground, they started kicking the nuts into a pile.

"I wonder how many we've got," says Tom.

"Plenty," says Tony.

"Let's put them in our bags," says Will.

"O-k," says Tony.

Which, of course, was the signal for us to put old Bumfuzzle to work.

"Click-clack! Click-clack! Click-clack!"

"What's that?" says Budge, in a hollow voice. Then, as the bushes parted, and old Bumfuzzle came into sight, shining ribs, wabbling head, leering eye and all, there was a combined terrified shriek.

"A ghost! A ghost!"

And away they went like a shot, forgetful of walnuts, wagon, bags and everything else.

Boy! Did *we* ever laugh! I thought I'd bust.

There was no danger of them coming back. So we took our time. And having filled our bags, we dumped them over the fence.

It was then that we heard someone coming. And fearful that it was the old doctor himself,

we tipped Bumfuzzle over on his face and dropped down beside him, scarcely daring to breathe.

Heavy footsteps passed our hiding place. And then, by the moving beam of a flashlight, held tightly in a big bony hand, we saw a man, with heavy black whiskers, stoop over and bury something in the soft earth beside the walnut tree.

Tamping the earth with his big feet, and muttering to himself, he then went back into the bushes. After which the footsteps got fainter and fainter.

Slats was the first one to get his voice back.

"Well, I'll be cow-kicked!" says he. "I wonder who that was?"

And then the amazement in his voice deepened as he dug up the buried object.

"Why! . . ." says he, staring at us. "It's nothing but an old stove poker."

I was shivering now. For that was a crazy place anyway. And common sense told me that a man who would bury an old stove poker at night was a good person for a small boy like me to keep away from.

"Let's get out of here," says I.

And now, I *am* going to bed. For the night is half over. I've got a lot more stuff to write down. But I'll do that to-morrow morning, while Friday is washing the breakfast dishes.

CHAPTER VIII

THE TUNNEL AT GOBLIN HOLLOW

October 26—It got pretty cold last night. And when I woke up this morning, at the first sound of the alarm, Friday was curled around me like an old grapevine.

"Break away," says I, giving him a shove.

"Br-r-r-r!" says he, shaking the bed.

And then he rubbed his cold nose against the back of my neck.

"I've got to warm it up some way," says he, with a shivery laugh.

"Get up and light the oil stove," says I, pulling the covers around me.

"It's your oil stove," says he. "So get up and light it yourself."

But he bounced out of bed in a jiffy when I told him that it was snowing.

"Oh, boy!" he cried, as he danced bare-legged in front of the frosted windows. "Now we can have a real battle—with snowballs and a fort and everything else."

"How about Slats and Tail Light?" says I. "Do they get in on it too?"

"Why not?" says he, with merry eyes.

"All right then," says I promptly. "I'll take Slats for my side."

He gave a stiff grunt.

"Huh!" says he. "You *would* pick out him —you big gyp. But that's o-k with me. I'll take what's left. And if you don't get the tar licked out of you, I'll eat my hat."

He wanted to dress right away. But I finally coaxed him back to bed. And it was then that he discovered the rag doll on his side.

Gee! I thought he'd glare his eyes out. For he hates the sight of dolls.

"I'll teach you to put a doll in bed with *me,*" says he, cracking me over the head with it.

"Cut it out," I squawked, making a grab for the covers.

I thought I'd be all right when I got my head covered up. But I was only too glad in the end to tumble out of bed and take to my legs.

Around and around the room we went, on the bed and off again, me screeching bloody-murder and him swatting to beat the cars. Pretty soon I got a shower of sawdust. And when I looked around, all he had left was an empty leg.

I wished then that we hadn't been quite so rough. For the doll was an old one of my ma's.

But it's a goner now. And if we ever get the sawdust swept up around here it'll be a wonder.

As I told Friday, when we were eating breakfast, we'd have to be kind of orderly from now on. For I want the place to look nice and neat when my ma gets home. So as soon as I put my diary away, he and I are going to tidy up. Then, if it isn't snowing too hard, we're going to call up the Beale kids and make a fort.

I kind of think we'll have to set up a heating stove too. For the whole house is like an ice box. And if we don't get a little more heat in here the water pipes are liable to freeze up.

Friday's ma called him up a few minutes ago to see if he was all right. We were having one of the worst blizzards in thirty years, she said. The railroads were blocked. And so were the highways. But I suppose everything will be opened up by to-night. Anyway I hope so. For I want my ma to hurry home with that present.

And now, while Friday is putting on a pearl-diving stunt in the dish pan, and flipping the dish rag at the cat, I'll tell you more about the stove poker that we dug up last night.

"What shall we do with it?" says Slats, when we got ready to start for home with our walnuts.

"Give it to me," says Friday.

And when I turned a flashlight on him he had the poker stuck in his belt like a sword.

"I'd hate to be you," says I, "if you ever got caught."

"What do you mean?" says he.

"Well," says I, "that man didn't hide the stove poker for nothing. When he put it there he expected it to stay there. And he looked blamed hard to me."

"I wish now," says Friday, as we started off with the loaded cart, two of us pulling and the others pushing, "that we had followed him."

"Where did he go?" says Slats, looking back.

"Over that way," says Friday, pointing toward the old Vett house.

Gee! My heart was thumping like an old steam engine now.

"Let's hurry," says I.

"What are you scared of?" says Friday.

"Maybe it wasn't a man at all," says I. "Maybe it was a black-whiskered ghost—one of those ghosts that old Dr. Vett fools around with."

Friday gave a reckless snort.

"And since when," says he, "did it get to be the style in ghostland for ghosts to go around burying stove pokers?"

"Maybe this ghost likes stove pokers," says I, thinking of the way dogs buried bones, and stuff like that.

It sounds kind of crazy, I know. But I was scared stiff at the time. So it was a big relief

to me when we turned the corner, into a lighted street.

The Crookers evidently had run all the way home. For there was no sign of them in that part of town. And having put our stuff away in Friday's barn, old Bumfuzzle included, we hurried over to my house to get some bananas.

The telephone was ringing. So I gave the banana bag a toss and ran into the hall.

"I bet a cookie," says Slats, following me, "that it's my ma. For she has seven cat fits if little Tail Light gets out of her sight at night."

But it turned out to be Mrs. Clarkey instead.

"I thought I'd call you up, Trigger," she spoke pleasantly, "to find out how you came out with your ghost trick."

"Everything was lovely," says I, "till old Santy Claus showed up."

"Santy Claus?" she repeated wonderingly. "Who do you mean?"

I told her then about the man with the black whiskers, and the buried stove poker.

She started to laugh, but stopped. And for a moment or two I thought that she had fainted. For all I could hear was the rumble of the wind.

"Trigger," she finally recovered her voice, "do you mean to tell me that you actually dug up a stove poker in my yard to-night?"

"Yes, ma'am," says I.

"Is it a new poker?" she followed up, in a queer strained voice.

"No, ma'am," says I. "It's all rusty. And it's got a funny handle."

"A large handle?" she inquired weakly.

"Yes, ma'am," says I.

There was another short silence. And again all I could hear on the line was that dull ghostly rumble of the wind.

"Trigger," she then resumed, "I want you to do something for me."

"O-k," says I promptly.

"Where is the poker now?"

"Out in the kitchen," says I.

"Please get it," says she. "And let me know if the handle is hollow."

"How can I tell?" says I.

"Shake it," says she, "and see if it rattles."

I could tell by the way she spoke that she was all worked up. I felt that she was scared too. And more puzzled than ever, I ran back to the kitchen, where Slats and Tail Light were fighting over the last banana.

"Pig," says Tail Light, pushing out his fat mug.

"Pig yourself," says Slats, in the same hard way.

"All I had was six," says Tail Light. "And if I don't get half of that one I'm going to tell

my ma about you eating the potato salad that she had saved up for the church ladies."

I pushed them out of my way.

"Quick!" says I to Friday, as he hurriedly grabbed the banana that the others were fighting about and ate it. "Give me the stove poker."

He could see that I was excited.

"What's the matter?" says he.

"Mrs. Clarkey's on the line," says I. "And when I told her about the stove poker she started to act queer. She wants me to shake it, to see if it rattles."

"What does she think?" says Friday. "That the poker is hers?"

"I don't know what she thinks," says I. "But she almost took a flop when I told her that a man with black whiskers had just buried a stove poker in her yard."

The poker had rolled under the kitchen table.

"I'll get it," says Tail Light.

We could hear something rattle.

"It's either the poker," says Friday, "or Tail Light's head."

"It's the poker," the little kid spoke for himself. "There's something in the handle. Hear?"

And when he shook the poker it rattled just like a bean in a tin can.

"It's funny we didn't notice that," says Slats, "when we first dug it up."

"Maybe it isn't a poker at all," says Tail Light. "Maybe it's a rattlebox."

Friday jeered.

"Listen to him!" says he. "He thinks it's a rattlebox. And he's hinting to us to let him play with it."

"I never," screeched Tail Light, with flashing eyes. And for a moment or two I thought he'd bend the poker over Friday's bean.

"Give it to me," says I, reaching for it. Then off I ran to the telephone.

But Mrs. Clarkey didn't keep me there very long.

"What's the matter now?" says Friday, as I grabbed my cap and started for the door.

"She wants us to come over there right away," says I. "For she's got something to tell us. And she wants to see the poker."

It was going to nine o'clock now. And the wind, as it whipped down the street, seemed icier and bitier than ever.

"Br-r-r-r!" says I, pulling up the collar of my sweater coat. Then away I ran as fast as I could go.

"Wait up," piped Tail Light, as he fell behind. But I was too anxious to get to the old Vett house to pay any attention to him.

Turning from Winchester Avenue into Washington Square, I soon came to the familiar iron gate, beyond which a winding flagstone walk

trails through a clutter of bushes to the front door.

"Gee!" says I, sort of shivery-like, as I stopped short. And for a moment or two I hadn't the nerve to go on. For that big bushy yard looked awfully spooky to me. My mind was full of the things that had happened here —the oiled door hinges, the housekeeper's queer hateful looks and finally the mysterious stove-poker guy himself. I thought of things I had heard too—about old Dr. Vett and his weird experiments. It was a good place to keep away from, all right, especially on a cold stormy night.

But I had told Mrs. Clarkey that I'd bring her the poker. So, gritting my teeth, I signaled to the other fellows, and kept on. And pretty soon we found ourselves at the front door.

Mrs. Clarkey had told me over the telephone to rap lightly. She'd be waiting for me, she said. And now, as she opened the big door on its noiseless hinges, and silently beckoned us inside, I was struck by the white drawn look on her usually sunny face.

It seemed amazing to me that a mere stove poker could have caused this change in her. And yet I knew that the poker that we had dug up was no ordinary poker. The hollow handle proved it. I felt too that it was tied up with

something of great importance—something that worried and upset her.

Tail Light had caught up with us at the gate. And now he followed us down a dark dingy hall, as we in turn followed Mrs. Clarkey.

There was a queer musty smell in the hall—it made me think of old clothes that had been put away in a chest for many years—dead people's clothes, and stuff like that. And once, as we passed an open door, beyond which I could hear a mournful ticking clock, I got a sniff of drugs. I could tell, all right, that Dr. Vett wasn't far away. And I had the feeling too that the glinty-eyed housekeeper knew everything that was going on.

"How do you like it?" I whispered to Slats, as we stopped before a closed door, the metal knob of which was carved like a tiger's head.

"Br-r-r-r!" says he, in an undertone.

"We'll go in here," Mrs. Clarkey spoke shortly, opening the door.

I could see a flickering wood fire. And then, as the lights were turned on, I saw countless rows of big sober-looking books.

"This is the library," Mrs. Clarkey spoke again. And then, having silently closed the door behind us, she asked abruptly for the stove poker.

I handed it to her.

"Yes," says she, after quick examination, "this is the one."

"How did it get away from you?" says I. "Did that guy with the black whiskers steal it on you?"

"I haven't seen it for many years," she spoke softly. And I was further struck by the peculiar faraway look in her eyes. "In fact," she added, "I had quite forgotten all about it. And least of all did I expect it to turn up now."

"Did you know the man who took it?" says I.

"No," she shook her head. "I haven't the slightest idea who he is. But I cannot doubt that there is some sinister trickery afoot. And that is why I sent for you. I wanted to question you about the man—to find out all I could. And later on I may even want you to go into the old Fisher tunnel with me."

Gosh! That didn't sound quite so hot. For I happened to know that the old Fisher tunnel, on the river bank, was one of the spookiest spots in the whole county. There's a big cut there—a sort of gully. And people who know the place well call it Goblin Hollow.

As I understand it, there used to be a cement mill on the river bank. And that's where Crocketville got started. But when the mill burned down, the people who had settled around it moved to higher ground. So in time nothing was left down there except a few scattered

stone cottages and the abandoned cement tunnel, out of which thousands of tons of rock had been hauled to the burner.

I've never been in the old tunnel myself. For someone started a mushroom bed in it a few years ago. And now it's boarded up. But I've heard my pa tell about it. For he grew up in Crocketville. And the tunnel was wide open then.

Putting the poker aside, Mrs. Clarkey told us to draw up our chairs, in front of the dancing fire. And here is the story she told us:

CHAPTER IX

MRS. CLARKEY'S STRANGE STORY

October 26 (*Continued*)—"My parents," Mrs. Clarkey began, as we gathered around her in front of the open fire, "were people of means. And liking nice things they built this big showy house soon after their marriage. It was a jolly place then. For they were jolly home-loving people. But it became a place of gloom and mystery when it fell into the hands of my brother later on.

"I don't know what happened to Roger at medical college. He may have studied too hard, thus upsetting some practical part of his brain. But something *did* happen to him. He went away a merry carefree boy, fired with the spirit of service. But when he came home, in his twenty-sixth year, his acquired medical skill was tinctured with some of the most fantastic beliefs on life and the hereafter ever accepted by a supposedly intelligent man.

"My father was deeply disturbed. But when he tried to reason with Roger, the latter, in a

fit of anger, picked up and went off to Europe, where he formed contacts, to his own liking, with the so-called wizards and mystics of Egypt, India and China. He was trying to find scientific basis for his fanciful theories. And failing, he came home, learning, when he got here, that his parents were both dead. It was his duty, as the surviving head of the house, to make me a good home. And so for many years he conducted a successful practice here, even leading me to believe that he had completely given up his peculiar theories. But in time the deep mystical look returned to his expressive eyes. And I knew then that he was merely waiting for some spiritual or physical manifestation that would justify him in openly resuming his earlier researches. On the pretext of consulting other experienced doctors, he frequently went to the city, where he secretly visited fortune tellers and trance mediums. And then, as the old beliefs got a firmer grip on his wavering mind, he even brought some of the more noteworthy mediums here, men and women who professed to have unusual psychic powers, and who could, so they claimed, go into trances and thus communicate with the dead.

"I didn't approve of these séances myself. But they interested me. So I never tried to avoid them. And through them I happily came in contact with my future husband, Professor

Elliot Elmore Clarkey, with whom I spent the richest years of my life, and who now lies buried in a small private cemetery in Goblin Hollow."

Goblin Hollow! As a picture of the lonely eerie place flashed through my head, I told myself that she wouldn't have buried her husband there if something funny hadn't happened to him. And yet this was easily explained.

"My husband," Mrs. Clarkey went on, "was born in the east. But his parents came from here—from the town's older stock, down by the river—which explains why he was buried there, that being his request. Even before I met him he had gained wide attention in the occult world through his organization of the American Association of Psychic Research. It was his belief that all so-called crystal gazers and supposed trance mediums were frauds. Their influence, he felt, was harmful to the public. So he went about exposing them, under the authority of the association that he had formed. All of which, of course, greatly nettled my imaginative brother, whose belief it was that under certain favorable light conditions the spirits of our dead could be brought back to earth in tangible visible form."

Tail Light was sitting with his mouth wide open. And as I took a peek at him, all I could think of was a crazy-looking fly trap.

"Shut it up," says I, giving him a punch.

Mrs. Clarkey was smiling now.

"What's the matter, Robert?" says she. "Am I talking too deep for you?"

"Oh," says he, in his dumb way, "I was just thinking about something." And then he held up his hands. "I can't figure out," says he, "whether I've got ten fingers or eleven fingers. For there's five on that hand—one, two, three, four, five—see? But if I count the others like this—ten, nine, eight, seven, six—that makes six on one hand and five on the other."

Suffering cats!

"He can't help it," I told Mrs. Clarkey. "For someone dropped a hammer on his head when he was a baby. So please go on with your story and forget about him."

"Do the rest of you boys understand what I'm talking about?" she then inquired, as she gravely searched our faces.

"Sure thing," says I. "You're talking about ghosts—people who die and come back to earth again with white sheets wrapped around them."

"But they don't really come back," Slats put in. "Do they, Mrs. Clarkey?"

"No," she spoke in the same grave way, "I'm positive myself, and so was my husband, that there's no such thing as a real ghost. Strange stories are told of supposed haunted houses. And wherever possible my husband ran these stories to earth, proving that they had no scien-

tific foundation. In the same way he openly attacked the so-called fortune tellers and crystal gazers, who, of course, became very bitter toward him. And bitterest of all was a medium, known to the public as Madam Altura, whose humiliating exposure took place in this very room, shortly after my marriage.

"Dr. Clarkey had long regarded Madam Altura as one of the cleverest of her kind. And so, when he had the chance to meet her here, he determined to expose her. My brother, on the other hand, had great confidence in the woman, who claimed to be the seventh daughter of a seventh daughter, which, in the language of her profession, was supposed to endow her with sensational psychic powers. Nothing was said in public about her husband; and few people outside of her own professional circle knew that she had a husband. But the professor knew it. For it was his business to unearth such things, in order to make his exposures more effective. He had further unearthed the interesting fact that her real name was Casey—a good old Irish name—and not the Turkish cognomen that she affected in her professional work.

"During the course of the planned séance, through which my misguided brother actually expected to convince my husband of the genuineness of the visitor's psychic powers, her 'spirit' was supposed to step out of a special

cabinet and into the darkened room, where we were seated in a circle. But what stepped out of the cabinet instead was the tricky medium herself, dressed in some kind of a flowing phosphorescent garment that glowed in the dark, thus enabling the spectators to follow her supposedly ethereal movements. My husband had a powerful flashlight. And when he turned it on her, thus publicly exposing her, as he had dozens of others like her, she threatened to kill him.

"But threats like that had no effect on him. He was used to them. And more determined than ever to rout his enemies, he went here there and everywhere, in the city and country alike, leaving behind him a telling trail of sensational exposures, all of which were eagerly picked up and widely exploited by the unprejudiced newspapers.

"Unfortunately though, there was one follower in the psychic ranks whose belief in the occult remained unshaken. That was my own brother, who even went so far, after extensive correspondence with the exposed medium, to bring her back to Crocketville. She could readily prove her psychic powers, she claimed to him, if given the proper surroundings. So on Hallowe'en—on the night of all nights most favorable to the earthly movements of ghosts and hobgoblins—she was taken into the depths

of the old Fisher tunnel, where it was claimed in advance that she would bring Satan himself to earth in the materialized form of a pleasing-mannered young man.

"My husband laughed long and scornfully when he learned of the intended underground séance, to which we were both invited. And I laughed too. For through tender association with him I had come to regard his convictions as my own. Neither of us had the slightest idea that the intended test would be a success. Nor was it. Yet something happened that memorable night that mystified the professor till his dying hour."

There was another pause here. And as Mrs. Clarkey leaned forward and stirred the fire, thus starting the shadows to dancing on the glass doors of the surrounding bookcases, I was peculiarly reminded of a band of roving goblins. There they were, with their funny pointed caps and corkscrew shoes. They eyed us curiously. And at times they got together and whispered about us.

"Did you boys ever try to figure out why you enjoy sitting around an open fire?" Mrs. Clarkey then inquired, as the wind continued to slap against the windows.

"No," I shook my head.

"It's all very simply explained," she proceeded. "At one time, in the development of the

world, our primitive ancestors had to sit in cold unlighted caves. Then came the discovery of fire. From then on the life of mankind was much happier, for he had heat and light. He came to worship the fire that gave him these comforts. And so, to this very day, we share his enjoyment of an open fire. It is instinct, born in us. In the same way we are influenced by man's early supernatural beliefs. Common sense tells us that there is no such thing as a real ghost. But how many of us enjoy crossing a cemetery at night? The fear of ghosts is born in us. In most cases we subdue the fear early in life. But it is the business of charlatans like Madam Altura—supposed psychics who care naught for the danger they do in human lives so long as their fee is assured—to foster such beliefs. Ghosts! Spirits! Supposed contact is made between the living and the dead. Grieving husbands go regularly to the haunts of the mystics to talk with departed wives. And many a heart-broken mother has paid her last dollar to hear the voice of a dead child. Such a business should not be allowed to thrive. And I'm not surprised that my noble-spirited husband fought it tooth and nail. He gave it so much concentrated effort, in fact, that he died long before his time. The work took practically all of his money. But I have no complaint on that score. I'm glad he spent the money as he did.

It was all done in the interests of humanity."

I thought she never would come to the part about the tunnel. So I mentioned it to her, sort of tactful-like, to hurry her along. But instead of picking up her story at that point she began to question us about the poker.

"I suppose," says she, "that it seems strange to you that I should attach so much importance to the recovery of a stove poker. But this is no ordinary poker. And I'm convinced that it was buried here for no ordinary purpose. I don't know *why* it was brought here. Nor have I the slightest idea who the man is who buried it. But your description of him, coupled with the time of his visit, is alarming in itself. And when I consider the circumstances under which I last saw the poker—those amazing dramatic circumstances!—I cannot doubt, as I say, that some peculiar mode of revenge is about to descend on me, as the result of my husband's earlier persecutions."

I thought that Friday's eyes would pop out of his face.

"Let's phone for the cops," says he.

But Mrs. Clarkey shook her head.

"As yet," says she, "I have no actual proof that my life is in danger. And if I were to seek the law's protection now, I would be laughed at. Besides," a grimmer look crossed her full face, "there has been too much curious comment

about this place. So I'm going to take the matter into my own hands. The man, you say, was heavily-bearded. But that probably was a disguise. And the fact that he came here disguised proves that he feared detection. So the thing to do, as I see it, is to secretly follow him into the Fisher tunnel and get a look at him in his real character. For he'll probably put aside the disguise there. Then, if I recognize him as an old enemy, I can turn him over to the law to be dealt with accordingly."

Boy! She sure talked as though she meant business, all right.

"But how do you know," says Slats, "that the man is hiding in the tunnel?"

"Because," says she, "that's where the poker came from—it was put there years ago as a part of the Magic Circle. And no doubt the man who removed it, with its collection of rust, is hiding there."

"You seem to overlook the fact," says I, "that the tunnel is boarded up. So how could anybody get in and out?"

"There must be a door," says she. "And if the door is locked, somebody has the key."

"There *is* a door," Slats declared.

"Yes," says Friday, with a sharp bob of his head, "and I know who carries the key to it. It's the old geezer who planted the mushrooms."

"Who do you mean?" Mrs. Clarkey inquired.

"I don't know his name," says Friday. "But he lives down there in a stone house. He's an old hermit, I guess."

"It will be well," says Mrs. Clarkey, "for us to find out all we can about him. For he surely knows if someone else is using his keys. Or it may be that he brought the poker here himself."

Friday took a dig at his head.

"But why should anybody hide a poker in your yard?" says he, sort of stumped-like. "That don't make sense to me."

"It does look like a senseless act," Mrs. Clarkey agreed. "But, for that matter," she spoke with increased agitation, "what sense was there to the Magic Circle itself, with its church-bell scrapings, burning pine cones and bats' blood? Nonsense, all of it—and the product of fanatical minds. It isn't surprising that people who deal in such things, to deceive others, should in time become misled themselves. And now apparently one of these fanatics, as exposed by my late husband, has set his mark on me. But forewarned is forearmed. And he'll find, before he gets through with me, that I can fight as effectively as the professor himself."

I saw what she meant. Some old enemy of her husband's had come back to bump him off. Of

course, you can't bump off a dead man. So the crazy schemer, who was suspected of hiding in the old tunnel, had picked out the wife instead.

But, like Friday, I still couldn't see any sense in the buried poker. And I found myself wondering, as I sat there, if Mrs. Clarkey wasn't letting her imagination get away with her. Maybe, I told myself, the stove-poker guy was just a nut.

A sudden sound behind me brought me to my feet. And there stood the glinty-eyed housekeeper with a loaded tray in her hands!

Even Mrs. Clarkey was startled by the servant's unexpected appearance.

"Why, Maggie! . . . I didn't hear you open the door. How long have you been standing here?"

"I just came in, ma'am," the servant spoke shortly.

"But why did you come without me ringing?" Mrs. Clarkey followed up.

"It's a cold night, ma'am. And I thought you'd like some hot choc'late and some spice cakes."

Evidently the woman had seen us come in, just as I suspected. For there were five cups on the tray. I had the feeling too, as she turned and left the room, in that sliding ghost-like way of hers, that she had been standing behind us a whole lot longer than she admitted.

Mrs. Clarkey gave a scattered laugh.

"Well, boys," says she, as she poured the chocolate and passed it out to us, "this is an unexpected treat. But let us enjoy it none the less for that reason."

The chocolate was swell. And so were the little cakes. But I was glad when the empty cups were returned to the tray. For I was anxious to hear the rest of Mrs. Clarkey's weird story.

And here it is:

CHAPTER X

THE MAGIC CIRCLE

October 26 (*Continued*)—"The subject of ghosts and spirits is a deep one," Mrs. Clarkey resumed, "and goes back into the very earliest history of the world. Then, as now, men and women speculated on the very probable mysteries that lay beyond the grave. And so all kinds of supernatural theories grew up, many of which have survived in some form or other to this very day.

"Some of the more pleasant theories involved druids, elves, gnomes and hobgoblins. It was believed at one time that druids, living in trees, were responsible for their growth. In the same way it was believed that waterfalls were tenanted by elves, mines by gnomes, and that all the processes of nature, so easily understood by us now, were regulated favorably or unfavorably by unseen spiritual personalities.

"These personalities became the subject of countless legends. To-day little children find great pleasure in these mystical stories. And

few people attach any importance whatsoever to the more sinister records that were compiled during the Dark Ages. But it was from one of these—a treatise on witchcraft and sorcery—that Madam Altura derived her knowledge of the Magic Circle."

Mrs. Clarkey then got up and took a black-bound book from its case beside the dancing fire.

"This," she explained to us, as she opened the book on the library table and called us around her, "is a copy of the original Black Book, supposed to have been the property of a certain Dr. Faust, an associate of the devil himself, who used the processes recorded here to bring the devil back to earth. And that is exactly what Madam Altura tried to do in the tunnel, having first made a Magic Circle in exact pattern of the one described in the book."

"Are there any pictures in the book?" Friday spoke eagerly.

"Yes," says Mrs. Clarkey. "Here's a picture of the Magic Circle itself."

"It looks like a clock," says Friday, as he studied the odd picture.

I gave him a jab with my elbow.

"Move over," says I, "so I can see it."

"There it is," says he.

"It does look like a clock," says I. "But instead of numbers like one o'clock and two

o'clock, it's got a lot of funny-looking marks around the circle."

"What do the marks mean?" Slats then inquired of Mrs. Clarkey.

"They really aren't marks," she explained. "They are objects, or symbols. That one," she pointed, "is a sea shell. And that one is a fire rod, or, as we know it to-day, a stove poker."

"What's that one?" Slats further inquired.

"A cup of bats' blood."

"Oof!" says Slats, drawing back. "I don't think I'd care to monkey around with stuff like that."

"Would you like to have me read you a complete description of the Magic Circle?" Mrs. Clarkey then inquired.

"Sure thing," says Friday. "Go ahead and read it to us."

So we went back to our seats near the fire. And here's what Mrs. Clarkey read:

> This is a true faire and perfect means of excelling over Nature and has been truthfully proved by ye writer after many trials during his travels in ye Low Countries. Deep in the earth, at a place most suitable for ye entrance of ye Prince of Darkness from his fiery kingdom, away from all light of ye sun and moon, with only ye light of burning pine cones and a single candle, ye

test must be made with a pure heart and mind and selfless intention. Ye time between one hour before midnight to one hour after is necessary, but best on ye evening preceding All-hallows, when ye spirits of ye dead are nearest. He that seeks ye truth must place himself in ye dark at time appointed. His servants must be a woman of belief, in faire white garments, and a virgin he goat. Let thy mouth and heart be free from foulness. Let the student test my words by ye light of pine fires which is necessary. Let ye student set ye following Magic Symbols which must be set out in a bigness suitable for his test, ye Magic Circle. First a shell from ye seashore, a cup of bats' blood, scrapings from a church bell, a jug of red wine, a fire rod from beside ye hearth where all goodness prevails, with ye snake's tooth in hollow iron handle, ointment of bee honey and soot, and pine cones for ye Great Light. Having set his symbols demanded by ye Black Booke as prescribeth above in all correctness he taketh his servants into ye Inner House within ye Circle of Power. The woman taketh her place by side of ye goat, which she leadeth on a white silken cord. Ye student then lighteth a bowle of faire incense which burneth for fifteen minutes, ye student repeating ye

following incantation: 'Mutare et insignem attenuat deus obsura promens.' At the end of time, with approach of ye Great Hour, ye woman anointeth ye goat saying: 'Terra es terram ibis.' Ye Goat is then to be turned around three times and ye infire is then dampeth by ye servant and ye student. All should now be in blackness except for ye light of candle. Ye woman now taketh vessel of wine and poureth it slowly over ye head of Goat, repeating: 'Procul O procul este profani.' Then ye woman quickly covereth and completely hideth ye he goat with a faire white cloth. Cometh ye Great Hour when churchyards yawn. And when cloth is removeth by ye woman, Lucifer as a faire youth of surpassing beauty is seene in the stead of ye Goat. This have I witnessed myself. Not for melancholic persons.

(Signed)
Dr. Faust

Of all the crazy junk! Bats' blood and church-bell scrapings.

"Do you mean to tell me," says I, when Mrs. Clarkey finished, "that a man by the name of Dr. Faust actually wrote that?"

"The book speaks for itself, Trigger," was her quiet reply.

"But you don't really believe it, do you?"

"Not in the least," she declared.

"And did your husband know about this book," says Friday, "when he got an invitation to go to the tunnel and watch the medium do her stuff?"

"Yes, indeed. For he had earlier made a deep study of all works of this kind. We met here late in the evening and went together to the tunnel, where the Magic Circle had already been prepared by Madam Altura's husband. The man met us at the mouth of the tunnel and silently conducted us to the spot where the supposed miracle was to take place. There were five of us in the party—the medium herself, my brother, the professor and I, and the woman's husband. The professor himself had no fear, as I say. And I can still picture him in my mind, as he walked boldly into the eerie tunnel. But I was less brave myself. And remembering the medium's threats, I experienced a growing uneasiness. For I couldn't make myself believe that she had forgiven us, though she appeared very pleasant and affable. The whole affair was utterly ridiculous to me. I hadn't a particle of confidence in the woman. And it hurt me to see how completely my own brother had gone over to her side. Now he either was supporting her in some intended trickery, or really expected to prove the soundness of his theories. He puzzled me. And once I was tempted to go back, beg-

ging him to go with me. Afterwards I wished I had gone back.

"Arriving at the Magic Circle, in the depths of the chilly tunnel, the lightly-attired medium touched a match to the pile of dry pine cones, which soon filled the tunnel with a pungent white smoke. At the same time she lit something in a brass bowl, which further added to the suffocating odors. The atmosphere became unbearable. I begged my husband to leave. But he refused. And then, when all of the rites had been carried out, exactly as described, an amazing thing happened. Only the candle was burning now. And by its feeble light I could detect an upward movement of the cloth that had been put over the provided goat. Higher and higher the cloth arose, and under it there appeared to be the outline of a man. There was an amazed cry from my husband. I screamed myself. Then, to my increased horror, the light went out. The tunnel was in total darkness. Above the other sounds I could detect a mocking laugh. It wasn't my husband. Nor was it the medium's husband. There was something under the cloth. It vanished in the darkness. And strangely the goat vanished too.

"The professor wouldn't believe that the expected miracle had happened. Using his own powerful flashlight, he searched the stone floor for evidence of a hidden trapdoor through

which an accomplice of the medium could have appeared at the proper time, and into which the goat could have been drawn out of sight. But there was no sign of a trapdoor nor opening of any sort. We were dumbfounded. As for the medium, I can still hear her triumphant scornful laugh as she picked up the poker and handed it to my husband. 'Take it,' said she, with a sneer. 'You and your wife will need it.' And then, as he dropped it, she hurried away. Nor have I seen her or heard of her from that day to this."

Friday's eyes stuck out like peeled onions.

"And do you really believe," says he, "that the medium made a ghost come up under the cloth?"

"Something came up under the cloth. There can be no doubt of that. But I'll never let myself believe, like my brother, that it was an actual spirit. It was trickery of some sort. He was tricked. So was my husband. And now that the matter has come up again, through the recovery of the poker, I'm going to search that tunnel myself. I'll never rest easy till I find out exactly how the trick was accomplished."

"But what did the medium mean," says Friday, "when she handed the poker to your husband and told him he'd need it?"

"We never found out. And that is why I felt so worried to-night when that poker came to

light. For I've never been able to get that tricky woman out of my mind."

"Maybe," says Slats, drawing on his imagination, "she thought you'd need the poker to fight off the spirit that got away from her that night in the dark."

Mrs. Clarkey was trembling now.

"Oh!" she cried. "I wish you hadn't said that. For I don't want to think of it. No, no! It can't be true," she wrung her hands. "It can't be true."

Slats acted as though the stiffening had all dropped out of his jaw.

"What can't be true?" says he bluntly.

"That I'm being haunted by something I can't see."

Friday grabbed my arm.

"Let's get out of here," he spoke in my ear.

"O-k," says I.

But Slats wouldn't budge.

"Do you hear things you can't see?" he inquired of Mrs. Clarkey.

"Yes," came the agitated reply.

"Footsteps?" Slats followed up.

"Yes," the woman spoke again. "I often hear peculiar footsteps. And I can feel something near me. But when I reach out to touch it, it evades me."

Friday was halfway to the door now.

"I think it's time for us to go home," says he, with a meaning glance in my direction.

"I think so too," says I.

"You probably think I'm a silly old woman," says Mrs. Clarkey, as she followed us to the door. "And certainly it was no intention of mine to frighten you. I simply lost control of myself. But it won't happen again. So you need have no fear in coming here."

"But if you actually hear things—" Friday began.

"Imagination," she cut in, "plays tricks on the best of us. But let us say no more about it. I doubt if we can go to the tunnel to-morrow on account of the weather. But I'll send for you when I need you. In the meantime, if you happen to go to the tunnel alone, and find anything of importance, let me know."

Nothing more was said till we got to the front door.

"Well, good-by, boys," says Mrs. Clarkey, as she turned the key in the lock of the big door and opened it for us. "Many thanks for coming over."

Slats hung back.

"May I ask you just one question?" says he, in his deep way.

"And why not?" she laughed gaily.

"Did your brother tell you that you were

being haunted by the same spook that got away in the tunnel?"

"Yes," she spoke shortly.

And then she hurriedly closed the door behind us.

Which takes care of that, and sort of brings me up-to-date. I can still hear Friday banging around in the dish pan. Or maybe he's got a wash tub in the kitchen. Anyway, he's making a lot of noise down there. But if he had ten wash tubs he couldn't make as much noise as the crazy wind. Boy! This is *some* storm, let me tell you. It gets worse every minute. With the new snow that's coming down, and the old snow that the wind is blowing around, the air is so thick that I can't see across the street.

Poor Miss Potts! Instead of putting in her time to-day, peeking at the neighbors as usual, she'll have to sit in her parlor and manicure the cat.

Which is all I'll be able to write down now. For Friday is yapping at me to come downstairs and answer the phone. Besides, it's time to get dinner. If anything new happens, I'll write it down to-night, before I go to bed.

CHAPTER XI

AN UNEXPECTED GUEST

October 26 (*Continued*)—It's Saturday night now. And the wind is still pounding around outside like an old giant hunting for rats. Our telephone wires are down. And it wouldn't surprise me a bit if we soon had to get out candles, like that spook party in the tunnel. For the way the wind is flipping the electric-light wires around is nobody's business.

Friday got kind of huffy at me to-day because I wouldn't go outside with him and build a snow fort as planned. But I told him that he was crazy. The wind would blow the fort down, I said, as fast as we could put it up. So what was the use of wasting our strength? There'd be plenty of snow left, I said, when the wind went down. In fact, from the way things look to-night, I think there'll be too much snow left. And I'm beginning to wonder what will happen to us. For you can't run a town, with delivery trucks and everything, with snow banks ten feet high. A few delivery trucks got into our street

this morning. But it's completely blocked now. And all the time the snow gets deeper.

Friday wouldn't believe though, until he actually went outside himself, that the storm was as bad as it looked. And did I ever laugh at him as he staggered back to the house. For the first thing he did was to fall into a snow bank up to his ears. I thought at first, as I watched him through the kitchen window, that I'd have to go outside and rescue him. But he finally got up of his own accord. After which he was perfectly willing to stay in the house the rest of the day.

I got two telephone calls this morning. The first one was from my ma, telling me that she and my pa would have to stay in the city till the storm let up. She acted kind of worried at first. But I told her there was nothing to worry about. I was getting along as slick as a button, I said. And to make her feel good I told her how neatly Friday and I had dusted the parlor furniture. But I didn't tell her about the onions that were still sitting around in the middle of the parlor floor.

The next call was from Slats. He wanted to come over, he said. But his ma was afraid that he'd get stuck in the snow.

"What are you going to have for dinner?" says he.

"Fried onions," says I.

"Oof!" says he. "I wouldn't come over now if I could."

I was just fooling about the onions.

"Friday is going to make waffles," says I.

"*Him?*" says Slats. And then he laughed. "I bet you both get the stomach ache," says he. "For I can imagine what the waffles will be like if Friday has anything to do with them."

"Don't kid yourself," says I. "He's an expert."

"What are you going to do this afternoon?" Slats then inquired.

"Friday wanted to build a snow fort," says I. "But I finally talked him out of it."

"Gee!" Slats spoke longingly. "I wish I could come over."

"Why don't you come over and stay all night?" says I.

"My ma won't let me," he grumbled.

"Coax her," says I.

"And if I can get her to say yes," says he eagerly, "shall I bring Tail Light too?"

"Why spoil the party?" says I.

"He'll yell like the dickens if I start off without him."

"Let him yell."

"Aw, shucks!" says Slats. "I think you might let him come too. For he's a good little kid."

"All right," I gave in. "Bring him along if

you want to. You live with him all the time. So I guess Friday and I can stand him for one night."

"Did you hear about the snow plow?" Slats then inquired.

"What snow plow?" says I.

"A big railroad snow plow started out of Garnet Corners last night with a coachful of show people hitched on behind. And now they're all stuck in a snow bank at Boney Island."

I laughed.

"What are the railroad people going to do?" says I. "Get out another snow plow to help the first snow plow out of the snow drifts?"

"The depot agent thinks that the snow plow can get out of its own accord with a little help. So he and a bunch of men have gone down there with snow shovels."

"Did your pa go?" I inquired.

"Sure thing. And now my ma is scared stiff that he'll fall through a crack in the railroad track and freeze to death."

There was a sudden crash in the kitchen.

"What's that?" Slats inquired.

"I think it was Friday's waffle bowl," says I.

Then I took a peek.

"Blame it!" I heard Friday grumble, in the next room. And then he started swishing a mop around.

"Yes," I told Slats over the phone, "it was the waffle bowl."

"Good-by waffles," he laughed.

"We can easily mix up some more batter," says I.

"What you ought to do," says he, "is to sit Friday in the bath tub and plug up the hole. Then the batter couldn't get away from you."

"I'll be looking for you," says I, as I got ready to hang up.

"Just a minute," says he. "I want to ask you something."

"Shoot," says I.

"Did you have any bad dreams last night?"

"No," says I.

"It's a wonder you didn't," says he, "after that crazy story."

"I was too blamed tired to dream," says I. "For I sat up half the night writing in my diary."

"Were you scared when you got home?" he further inquired.

"No," says I, "but I was scared over there."

"I've been doing a lot of thinking," says he.

"What with?" says I pleasantly.

"That's an old one, Trigger. Why don't you get something new for a change?"

"What have you been thinking about?"

"That spook of Mrs. Clarkey's," says he.

"And do you really believe," says I, "that

she's being haunted by the spook that got loose in the tunnel?"

"No," said he. "For I don't believe in spooks. But evidently her brother wants her to think that she is being haunted. And that's the part that puzzles me. Is he just trying to scare her, or does he really know something?"

"If I hadn't gotten the story from Mrs. Clarkey herself," says I, "I'd never believe that people could be so silly. Bats' blood and church-bell scrapings! Did you ever hear of a crazier mess?"

"It does sound crazy," Slats admitted. "And yet it seemed to work. For Mrs. Clarkey said herself that something came up under the cloth at the right time."

"It was a trick," says I.

"I think myself," says Slats, in his thoughtful way, "that the cloth was put over a hole in which something was hiding. Still, Professor Clarkey went over the floor with his flashlight. Mrs. Clarkey said so. And all he found was solid rock."

"I wonder if the Magic Circle is still there?" says I curiously.

"If it is," says Slats, "I'm going to take a look at it."

"Gee!" I shivered. "I don't know whether I'd have the nerve to go in that spooky old tunnel or not."

"Did you ever see the man that boarded it up?"

"No."

"He's a funny-looking geezer. All clawed-up on one side of his face. An old circus man."

"Who told you?" says I curiously.

"Oh, I heard the kids talking about him. He's got a big orchard. But no one dares to touch his stuff. For he's meaner than the dickens."

"Does he have whiskers?" says I.

"No," says Slats.

"How big is he?" says I.

"Oh, about like my pa, only kind of humped over."

"Then it wasn't him," says I, "that buried the poker."

"It could have been Dr. Vett himself," says Slats.

"But why should he bury a poker in his own yard?" says I.

"To scare his sister."

"You talk as though he hates her," says I.

"I didn't say it was him. I just said it could have been him. For it was a man of his height. And it's easy enough to get false whiskers."

That set me to thinking.

"The man did go right toward the house," says I.

"We should have followed him," says Slats.

"Well, why didn't you?" says I.

"I would have, if I had known how important it was."

"I was only too glad myself," says I, "to get out of there."

"If Dr. Vett really has it in for his sister," Slats then studied the thing out, "the chances are that he's the guy who buried the stove poker. He did it to keep her scared. But if he hasn't anything against her, and actually believes that there *is* a spook in the house, it may be that we'll find somebody in the tunnel after all."

I could smell something burning. So I hung up. And when I got to the kitchen there was waffle batter all over the top of the stove, on the sides of the stove, all over the floor and everything else.

"It's kind of hard to turn them," says Friday, giving the iron a flip.

And out came another shower of batter!

"I think I better put on my boots," says I, wading around.

"How do you like them?" says Friday. "Well done?"

"Any way," says I, "except dragged around on the floor."

He opened up the iron.

"Um-yum-yum!" says he, jabbing with a fork. "There's a lulu. Fit for the king himself."

And then, as the waffle got away from him

and started rolling around on the floor, he made a grab for it.

"Hold 'er, Newt," I encouraged. "She's a-rearin'."

"I've got it," says he triumphantly.

"What makes it so hard?" says I.

"It's just well done," says he, brushing it off.

"Well," says I, "don't drop any more of them on the floor, or you'll have it all knicked up."

"There it is," says he, flopping it proudly onto a plate.

I brought in a saw and auger.

"All right," says I, seating myself courageously at the table. "I'll work up as much of it as I can. But if the worst comes to the worst, remember that I never did like calla lilies."

That's the way Friday and I fool around. It's fun. And having eaten a hearty meal—for the waffles were pretty good after all—we scraped the batter off the stove and warmed a pan of water.

"How about mopping the floor," says I.

"Oh," says Friday, as he stepped over a puddle of batter, "let's not do any mopping till the floor really needs it."

"O-k," says I, covering up the puddle with a newspaper.

We looked for Slats all afternoon. And when

he failed to show up, I tried to get him on the telephone. But the line was dead. And that's when I learned that the wires were down.

Friday's pa waded in just before supper. He had been trying all the afternoon, he said, to get us on the telephone. Wanting to be polite, I invited him to stay and eat supper with us. But when he got a look at the kitchen he said he wasn't very hungry.

Friday was jiggling around on the top of a stepladder.

"How's ma?" says he.

"Well," says Mr. Fish, "she was kind of worried when I started out. She thought something was wrong over here. But she'll be all right when I get home."

Friday loosened a spot on the ceiling.

"It's funny," he grumbled, "how that waffle batter got clean up here."

"There's another spot over there," I pointed.

"I'll get it," says he, reaching out.

Then down he came, stepladder and all.

Mr. Fish looked kind of dizzy.

"I think I better go," says he, edging toward the door.

"And you're sure," says I, "that you wouldn't like to stay and eat waffles with us?"

"Yes," says he hastily, "I'm very sure."

"If you'd rather have some fried onions—" I began.

"Sure thing," cut in Friday. "Go back and get ma and we'll all have fried onions."

But I could tell by the look on Mr. Fish's face that he didn't care very much for fried onions.

"So-long," says he, opening the door.

And then who should roll in, just like a couple of dressed-up snowballs, but Slats and the missing link.

"Whoopee!" yipped Friday, as he danced around the newcomers. "Now we can have some real fun."

Mr. Fish went away with a worried look on his face, telling us the last thing to be careful of the oil stove and not eat too much. He'd be watching our bedroom light, he said. And if we winked it three times he'd hurry over to see what was wrong.

Slats had a big cake that his ma had sent over. But instead of eating it first, as Tail Light suggested, we boiled some potatoes and macaroni. We thought we could save time by cooking the two together. But it didn't work out very good. The potatoes were all right. They boiled swell. But the blamed macaroni puffed up and crawled out of the kettle, making an awful stink on top of the stove. So finally we put the potatoes in another kettle, to finish cooking, and threw the macaroni away. But that was all right. We still had potatoes, dried beef, pickles, bread, butter, chocolate cookies,

peach preserves, jelly, apple butter, spiced crabapples, raspberry jam, cherry sauce, ketchup and cake.

It's now going on to nine o'clock. I'm upstairs in my room. The other fellows are downstairs. And as I sit here writing in my diary I can hear Slats and Tail Light fighting over a gumdrop. We're all going to sleep in the same bed to-night. And to-morrow morning we're going to settle the argument of who's the best fighter—the Yanks or the Germans. Friday tried to slip one over on me by gathering up all the pillows. But I know where he hid them. And I'm going to snitch them on him before morning. I've already told Slats to be prepared. Boy! I bet we have fun. I can hardly wait.

(Later) Suffering cats! We've got company. A great big geezer with a bristly mustache and a peg-leg just walked in on a cane. I thought at first that the newcomer was old Santy Claus himself. But it turned out to be a captain—a regular ship captain. And he came in on that train with the snow-bound show people.

But instead of telling about him here, I think I'll start another chapter. And I'll go back and tell just how he thumped on the door with his cane, and everything.

CHAPTER XII

UNCLE HEZZIE

October 26 (*Continued*)—The fight between Slats and Tail Light was suddenly interrupted by a clatter at the front door. Someone was shaking the door and pounding on it with a cane.

"Hey, Trigger," Friday yelled up the stairs. "Come on down. You've got company."

"Who is it?" says I, from the head of the stairs.

"An old geezer in a fur coat."

I thought of the stove-poker guy.

"Has he got whiskers?" says I quickly.

"No," says Friday. "But I saw a big mustache through the glass door. It sticks out like a bushy old paint brush. And there's an icicle hanging to the middle of it."

"I don't know any man with a bushy mustache," says I.

"Well," says Friday, as the pounding continued, "you better come down and talk to him if you want to save your door. For it sounds

to me as though he's trying to punch a hole in it."

I could hear a deep bass voice now.

"Ahoy thar, shipmates! Open the door. It's ol' Hezekiah Stubble hisself, standin' out here in the cold."

Hezekiah Stubble!

"Suffering cats!" I squawked. "It's Uncle Hezzie."

"Uncle Hezzie?" says Friday, searching my face. "Who in heck is he?"

"My ma's uncle," says I. "He's an old sea captain. He lives down by the Atlantic ocean somewhere. She says he's harder than nails. But I never saw him myself."

"Come, come," the deep voice boomed again. "Step lively in thar. Strike my colors! This is no night to keep a man waitin' outside—not an ol' man like me. Open up, I say. Or by the powers of ol' Davey Jones hisself, I'll walk in on you door an' all."

Friday gave me a shove.

"Go and open the door," says he. "What's the matter with you? Can't you hear him yapping to get in?"

"I don't know whether I want to let him in or not," says I uncertainly.

"Don't be silly," says Friday. "You can't leave him out there in the cold. Besides, if you don't open the door pretty soon you won't have

any door left. For he isn't carrying that cane for nothing."

"I wish my ma was here," says I helplessly.

Friday then whizzed by me and opened the door himself.

"Come in," says he politely, when the door swung open.

"Wa'al, wa'al," boomed the furry newcomer, as he weaved into the house and dropped his shabby leather bag in the middle of the floor. Then he cocked his brass-buttoned cap on the back of his head and looked us over. "Dash my buttons," he further boomed, "if the brig hain't manned by a crew of cabin b'ys. Cabin b'ys, mind you. Here you, sonny," he spoke to me. "Bring up alongside an' help me out of this bundlesome coat. Lively now."

"I'll help you," Friday spoke quickly.

"An' who mought you be?" the old man whiffed through his icy mustache.

He was a big man, with broad shoulders and huge ham-like hands. His hair was the color of dirty snow. It stuck out on all sides, giving him a sort of boyish look. But there was nothing boyish about his bushy eyebrows and piercing gray eyes.

"Come, come," he spoke sharply to Friday. "Don't keep me waitin' all night fur an answer. Speak up now. Who mought you be? The b'y of the house?"

"No," Friday shook his head. "I'm just a neighbor boy." Then he pointed to me. "There's the boy you want."

I could feel the gray eyes boring holes in me.

"An' what mought your name be?" says he, putting one of his big hands on my head. "Hezekiah Berg?"

"No," says I. "It's Henry Berg."

Having dropped his wet overcoat on the floor, the old man moved curiously about the room, one hand thrust into the pocket of his heavy dark-blue jacket, and the other gripped tightly over the head of his heavy black cane.

"A right handy little cove," says he. Then he stopped in front of Slats. "An' who mought you be, matey?" he demanded, in his fierce way.

"My name is John Beale."

"Humph!" the visitor whiffed. "Henry an' John! Thar's no honor to me in them names. Not a bit of it. Hezekiah! Thar's the name I'm lookin' fur. A name that *is* a name. Slit my sides! No lad by the name of John or Henry will ever git the chance to mess around in my money. Not if I know my own mind. An' nobody has said yet that the ol' skipper is in his dotage. By the livin' thunder! They stepped lively when *I* was the master. Good an' bad, better an' worse, fair weather an' foul—I've seen it all, with even blood on the deck. *Blood*, mind you. But now I'm a poor ol' hulk on a lee

shore. Barnacled an' water-logged. But thar's money whar I put my hand," he concluded, with a crafty look on his wrinkled face, "an' you can lay to that."

Gee! He was talking like an old pirate now. Money! And blood on the deck!

"Whar's your ma?" he then growled at me.

"She's in Chicago," says I.

"So?" says he, giving me a sharp look. "Chicago, heh? Fur long?"

"She planned to come back to-morrow," says I. "But she may have to stay till Monday or Tuesday, on account of the storm."

"An' your pa?—is he with your ma?"

I nodded.

"My pa works in a coal office," says I. "And he and my ma went to Chicago to see some coal men."

"An' who mought this little feller be?—your brother?"

He meant Tail Light.

"No," I shook my head. "I haven't any brothers. Nor sisters either."

A cloud passed over the old man's leather-like face.

"Now, that *is* a disap'intment," he rumbled. "Jest the one b'y in the family, an' him named Henry. But thar's no use lamentin' over a zebra's stripes. If they're yaller they're yaller an' no amount of stewin' can ever change 'em."

I had noticed when he first dropped his big coat that he had a peg-leg. It was fastened with straps to his left knee. And when he moved around the room he went thump! thump!

"My ma wouldn't have gone to Chicago," says I politely, "if she had known that you were coming."

"Thunder!" he whiffed. "I don't tell wimmin when I come an' go. Not a bit of it."

Friday gave me a nudge.

"Maybe he's hungry," says he, in an undertone. "Ask him."

"Wa'al now," the old man beamed, when I offered to make him some coffee. "Thar's an idea fur you. *Coffee,* mind you. It was a mistake, lad, when they up an' named you Henry. Dash my buttons! They should 'a' called you Hezekiah instead. Fur I can see that you're smart as paint. Yes, coffee it shall be—an' plenty strong, as suits the whim of a master. Strong an' *black.* No sugar nor cream—not for me. Jest black, sonny. An' now step lively."

Friday followed me into the kitchen.

"What are you going to make the coffee in?" says he.

"The coffee pot, of course," says I.

"I think you'll have to use a pan," says he. "For I filled up the coffee pot with boiled potatoes."

So I got out a pan. And putting in a cup of

coffee, I covered it with water and lit the gas stove.

"Take that junk off the table," says I, "and we'll let him eat here."

"What are you giving him besides coffee?" says Friday.

"There's some doughnuts in that bag," I pointed.

"I bet he'll like some toast too," says Friday.

"O-k," says I. "There's the bread. And there's the electric toaster."

"How about some pickles," says Friday, "and some cherry sauce?"

"It won't do any harm," says I, "to set out plenty."

So I got out everything in sight—pickles, cookies, cake and everything else.

Friday took a peek at the steaming coffee.

"It looks awfully black," says he critically.

"Well," says I, "that's the way he ordered it."

And getting a big empty cup I filled it up.

"That'll never do," says Friday.

"What's the matter?" says I.

"The cup's half full of coffee grounds."

"Pour it back into the pan," says I, "and we'll strain it through a towel."

Slats came in then to see how we were getting along.

"I just performed an operation," he laughed.

"What kind of an operation?" says I.

"Oh," says he, "Uncle Hezzie wanted the icicle cut out of his mustache. And when I got through cutting there wasn't much of the mustache left."

"He looks like an old walrus," says Friday.

"Yes," says I, "and he whiffs like one too."

"He walked from the depot," says Slats. "That's how he got the icicle in his mustache. For the snow that struck his face melted and run down."

"But how did he get to the depot?" says I wonderingly.

"Oh, he came in on that show train. He was over at Garnet Corners. And when the show people learned that he was headed for here they offered him a ride."

"It's a wonder that he ever got to the house alive," says I, "with that wind in his face."

Friday gave me a quizzical look.

"Do you like him, Trigger?"

"Of course," says I. "Why shouldn't I? He's my ma's uncle."

"How old is he?"

"Oh, he's up in the seventies, I guess."

"Has he still got a ship?"

"I don't think so."

"He told me," says Slats, "that he sold his ship last year."

Friday gave me a dig in the ribs.

"Do you hear that, Trigger?" he laughed. "He's got money. So you better change your name to Hezekiah, and he'll make you rich."

"I'd rather be poor," says I, "than to carry around a name like that."

"What's he doing?" Friday then inquired of Slats.

"Oh, growling to himself on the sofa. He's got a pain in his leg, he says. So it may be that we'll have to put on a nurse-maid act before morning."

Having strained the coffee, I put it on the table.

"There," says I. "That ought to warm him up."

"Shall I call him?" says Friday.

"Go ahead," says I.

The old man came in limping.

"They hain't no convenience," he growled, "to a wooden leg—not to an ol' salt like me. But sometimes I wish they was both wood. Thunderation! To be crippled up like this in my old age. *Me* with the gout, an' only one leg to have it in too. Now, I ax you, matey, is there anything fair in that?"

I helped him sit down.

"There's your coffee," I pointed.

"An' right good coffee it is," says he, swigging it down in big gulps. "Plenty strong, an'

I'll lay to that. But what's coffee to a seasoned old salt like me if it hain't strong? This sets the blood to b'ilin'. But that knee—now it mought help some, matey, if you were to find a bit of liniment. What say you? Can you favor an ol' man like me a bit more?"

"There's all kinds of stuff in our medicine cabinet," says I.

"Now," he beamed, "thar's a lad fur you—after my own heart, I say. Always willin' to jump an' fetch at the first signal of distress. Oh, poor me, poor me! With a leg like this. And the man I was in my younger days."

"Have some doughnuts," says I.

"The liniment, lad—don't furgit the liniment."

"I'll put that on," says I, "when you go to bed."

He gave me a warm pat on the back.

"An' they named you Henry," says he. "Jest plain Henry! Now, that *was* a mistake—a blunderin' brainless mistake—an' I'll give my affydavy to that."

I like him better every minute.

"Have some more toast," says I.

"An' mought I trouble you fur some more coffee, lad—just a wee drop or two?"

I motioned to Friday to get the towel.

"Thunderation!" boomed the old man, from his place at the table. "Whar did you young

'uns git the notion that coffee had to be strained through a shirt-tail? Now, that's a silly mess. Hand it over, matey—grounds an' all. No finicky ideas fur me."

"All right," says I, putting the pan in front of him. "Help yourself."

And when he got through there wasn't a ground left!

Slats had gone upstairs to open the spare bedroom. And it was his report, when he came back, that the room was like an ice box.

I saw then that we'd have to set up a stove. For it wasn't right to put a nice old man like that to bed in a cold room—especially when he had a lame leg. So I took the other fellows up to the attic with me. And after a lot of pulling and tugging we finally uncovered the small air-tight heater that I mentioned in the earlier part of my diary.

"Do you call that thing a stove?" says Slats, as he walked around it.

"Sure thing," says I.

"It looks like a lop-sided garbage can to me."

"It's made of tin," says I. "And it starts giving heat the moment you light a newspaper inside of it."

"And what are you going to do?" says he. "Sit up all night and burn newspapers?"

"Of course not," says I. "I'm going to put wood in it."

"Evidently," says Slats, studying the stove, "that round hole is where the stovepipe goes in. And that cookie-cutter thing down there is the draft. But what's that cover for?"

"That's where you put the wood in," says I.

"In the *top?*"

"Sure thing."

"Well," he shrugged, "it may be all right. But it looks like a junky outfit to me."

"Help me carry it," says I.

"O-k," says he.

Friday went ahead of us with the stovepipe.

"I'm stuck," says he, when he came to a bend in the stairs.

"Take the pipe apart," says I.

I don't know how it happened. But in fooling around with the pipe he accidentally knocked the stove out of our hands. And the first thing I knew poor Friday and the stove and everything else was piled up at the foot of the stairs.

Uncle Hezzie thumped out of his room.

"Jumpin' Jerusalem!" he roared. "Who blew up the ship?"

Friday tried to make out that I pushed him down the stairs. He saw me do it, he said. But he quit growling at me after a minute or two. For he's a good kid.

Cleaning up the mess at the foot of the attic stairs, we later set up the stove in Uncle Hez-

"I DOCTORED UP UNCLE HEZZIE'S LAME LEG WITH LINIMENT."

zie's room. And when everything was nice and warm in there, I doctored up his lame leg with liniment. He's sound asleep now, with his cane and his peg-leg on a chair beside the bed. And having fixed the fire for the night, I think I'll jump into bed and do a little sleeping myself.

CHAPTER XIII

A WILD NIGHT

October 26 (*Continued*)—Can you imagine it? I'm still writing about the stuff that happened on Saturday night. And, bu-lieve me, I've got plenty to write about. Talk about a wild night! Oh, oh! I'm almost a wreck myself. But poor Friday is much worse off than me. For on top of getting the wits scared out of him, like the rest of us, he got a burn on the end of his nose.

It all happened in Uncle Hezzie's room. And the thing that made it happen was that blamed stove. Slats wasn't so dumb when he said it was a bunch of junk. But having nothing better to heat the house with I suppose we've got to keep on using it till my pa gets home. You can bet your last cent though that we're going to keep our eyes on it every minute that we've got a fire in it.

It has drafts and dampers just like any other stove. But when you leave the drafts open the least little bit it burns itself silly. And if you

shut it up tight it puffs off like powder. We tried it both ways, and we know!

Poor Uncle Hezzie! He's sorry, I guess, that he ever left his own home down by the Atlantic ocean. But as I told him, it wasn't our fault that the crazy stove puffed off and almost gassed him to death. We did the very best we could. But you can't expect kids like us to know everything.

I almost dread to have my ma come home now. For I can imagine what she'll say when she sees that bedroom ceiling. Ouch! It was a beautiful pale pink when we put Uncle Hezzie to bed. And as I unstrapped his peg-leg, and helped him out of his pants, I particularly noticed the overhead flowers as they peeped so prettily out of their baskets. But now the ceiling looks like the inside of a smoke-house.

Here's how it happened:

I'll go back now to when the stove got away from us and tumbled down the stairs.

Friday got an awful bump at the foot of the attic stairs, as I said. But he forgot his grief, and started to giggle instead, when Uncle Hezzie got out a long flannel nightshirt and a tasseled skull cap. That's when we were setting up the stove.

"Not so stylish," says the old man, as he buttoned himself in for the night. "But it's right comfortable. An' comfort is what counts with me."

It took me some time to put on the liniment. For I had to rub it in. And when I got back to my own room the other fellows were all ready for bed.

"We're going to sleep crossways," says Slats, meeting me at the door.

"I know a better way than that," says I.

"How," says he, hitching at his pajamas.

"You and I'll sleep at the foot," says I. "And we'll let the other fellows have the head."

That brought Friday to life.

"What do you mean?" says he stiffly. "That you're going to stick your old feet in my face?"

"My feet never killed anybody yet," says I.

Friday turned to his partner.

"Do you hear that, Tail Light?" says he. "The Yanks are going to try and gas us to death before the battle starts. System, huh?"

"If we can stand it," says I, reaching for my diary, "I guess you can too. For I never heard of any perfume manufacturers hanging around you for ideas."

But Friday wouldn't give in. And when I went to bed, at ten-thirty (I sat up and did a lot of writing), there the three of them lay in a row. I had to squeeze to get in. And in doing so I woke Slats up.

"Did you fix the fire?" says he sleepily.

"Sure thing," says I.

"What are you burning?" says he.

"Green wood," says I.

"Where did you get it?" says he.

"There's a whole bunch of it in the basement," says I. "And I filled the stove to the top. So everything ought to be nice and warm around here when we get up in the morning."

Slats leaned over and snickered in my ear.

"I know something," says he, in a low voice.

"What?" says I quickly.

"You forgot to snitch those pillows on Friday."

"I'll do it now," says I, starting to get up.

But I lay down again, and settled myself for a long comfortable snooze, when Slats told me that he already had hidden the pillows under the mattress.

Pretty soon a big German with a bushy mustache and a peg-leg came down the street and started bombarding the house. Bang! bang! bang! bang! It woke me up. And jumping out of bed I ran into the hall. For what I had mistaken for a bombardment wasn't a bombardment at all, but Uncle Hezzie pounding on the headboard of his bed.

"What's the matter with him?" says Slats, as he came up behind me.

"I guess he's having bad dreams," says I.

And then, as a wave of heat struck me in the face, I darted into the old man's room and turned on the lights.

"The stove!" I cried. "It's red all over!"

Uncle Hezzie lit into us then.

"Thunderation!" he boomed. "What are you b'ys aimin' to do to me?—roast me before my time? Lively now. Turn the damper in the pipe. Or the first thing you know we'll have a bad fire around here."

It was on the tip of my tongue to ask him why he didn't jump up and check the stove himself, instead of yapping at us. But remembering about his peg-leg I kept shut. And afterwards I was glad I did. For he had a lump on his right knee as big as a mellon.

Friday came in then.

"What's the rumpus?" says he, rubbing his eyes.

"We almost had a fire," says I.

"You should have closed that damper in the pipe," Slats told me.

"And is it all right now?" says I dizzily.

"Sure thing."

Our attention was then drawn to Uncle Hezzie, who called us over to the bed to show us his swollen knee.

"It mought help some," says he weakly, "if you bathed it in warm water."

"Does it hurt?" says I.

"HURT!" he boomed at me. And for a second or two I thought he was going to jump out of bed and thump me to death with his cane.

Then he lay back and groaned. "Would I be a-takin' on like this," says he, with misery in his voice, "if it didn't hurt? I'm no calf. Of course it hurts. But I won't whimper no more 'an necessary, matey, if you do your part. Some warm water now. An' step lively."

Getting the water, I bathed his leg as carefully as I could.

"Oh," he groaned, "woe is me; woe is me. The ol' hull's on 'er bottom now. But it's no wish of mine. Not a bit of it. I'm a man of spirit. A master. An' it gives me no flavor to beg fur attention. But if you'll stand by me, matey, you'll fare well in the end, an' you can lay to that."

"I'll help you all I can," I promised.

That set him to beaming.

"Thar now," says he, in a pleased voice. "Didn't I know it? Dash my buttons! You can't fool me on a young face—not me you can't. Right off I says to myself, thar's a lad with a headful—as smart as paint, I says, an' you can lay to that. . . . Mought you be goin' down to the galley right soon, matey?"

"I will if you want me to," says I.

"Thunder!" says he. "An' ol' nuisance; a confounded ol' nuisance. Always beggin' this an' beggin' that. So to bed, lad, an' furgit my ailments. I'll weather the gale. Trust the skipper. To bed now, an' step lively. "

But I hung back.

"What was it you wanted?" says I. "Go ahead and tell me. For I like to do things for you. Honest I do."

His leathery face was aglow now.

"I hain't aimin' to wear you out. Not a bit of it. But if you insist—wa'al I *would* like another gen'rous mug of that fine coffee. A plump mug, matey—plump an 'hot. Thar now. Let's see what you can do."

"O-k," says I, starting off.

Drinking the coffee that I later brought up to him in a big bowl, he then lay back with a contented sigh. And turning out the light I left him.

"How's the stove?" says Slats, as I again crawled in beside him.

"Just the way you left it," says I wearily.

"It may be," he spoke thoughtfully, "that I shut it up too tight. But that's better than leaving it open."

"And what will happen," says I anxiously, "if you did shut it up too tight?"

"Nothing," says he sleepily.

But something did happen. And now comes the part where poor Friday got burned on the nose.

BANG!

Was it that crazy German again? Or had the wind caved in one of the windows? It took

me several seconds to collect my wits. Then, as I caught the smell of smoke, I jumped out of bed and ran down the hall.

Uncle Hezzie was choking. I could hear him. And as I tumbled into the room I began to choke too. It was the smoke.

"Fire!" I yelled. "Fire! The house is on fire!"

And running to the invalid's bed I grabbed him by the hair.

"Quick!" I yelled. "Get up and lean on me. For the house is on fire."

There was no sign of a blaze. But the smoke kept getting thicker every second. And realizing that I'd be done for myself, if I didn't get some fresh air, I ran to a window and opened it, thus letting in a shower of snowflakes.

Slats fought his way through the smoke.

"It's the stove," he gasped. "It blew up."

"I tried to pull Uncle Hezzie out of bed," I gasped in turn. "But he was too much for me. I couldn't budge him."

"I'll help you," says Slats.

So we groped our way to the bed. And taking the old man by the arms we dragged him into the hall, where we left him groaning on the floor.

"Now," panted Slats, as he turned back into the room where the fire was, "let's throw the stove out of the window."

But we found, when we got to the stove, that

the house wasn't on fire at all. The smoke all came out of the fuel hole.

"It's that green wood of yours," says Slats. "It made so much smoke that the cover blew off."

I wanted to give the stove a heave anyway. For I was all fed up on it. And in jiggling it around I loosened the pipe, a section of which tumbled down on poor Friday's head.

"Ouch!" he squawked.

And when I looked around at him he was holding his nose.

The hot pipe started the bedroom rug to smoking. So we threw both the rug and the pipe out of the window into the snow. Then we put out the fire with a pail of water.

Uncle Hezzie in the meantime had crawled to the doorway. And drawing himself into a sitting position, with his back to the door casing, he told us things I'd hate to repeat. We were a parcel of numskulls, he said—only he didn't say it, he roared it at us. He called us idiots too, and nitwits. If pepper was brains, he said, we couldn't sneeze loud enough to jar a grasshopper. But he finally run down. And then, with a whine, he begged us to help him back into bed.

"I know, I know," says he wearily, when I told him over and over again how sorry I was for the accident. "But if it *should* happen ag'in, mought I ask you, matey, to grab me some other

place besides the hair? Oh, me! Oh, me! I would 'a' been wiser to stay at home. But now that I'm anchored here, with a crippled mast, I reckon I'll have to make the best of it."

"Did you see the cover of the stove when it blew off?" says Slats.

"No," whined the exhausted old man. "But I heard it. Thar was a puff. Then a clatter, as the cover come down. An' then this young numskull heaved into sight an' started yankin' me by the hair."

"What shall we do?" says Friday. "Set the stove up and build another fire in it?"

"It's the only thing we can do," says I, with a shiver. "But this time we'll use dry wood. And we'll sit right here and watch the fire till it goes out."

The stovepipe gave us a tussle. For it was bent out of shape. But we finally got it straightened out, after which we carefully rekindled the fire.

Everything seems to be o-k now except the burned rug and that dirty ceiling. And I'm wondering if we can't clean the ceiling with bread dough. Slats says his ma cleans her wall paper that way. She goes all over the paper with spongy bread dough. And when she gets through, the wall paper is just as good as new. For all the dirt sticks to the dough.

(Later) Well, we're all fixed now. I just

mixed up a big batch of dough. It's the first time I ever did anything like that. And I never knew before that bread dough had to set all night in a pan to raise. The cook book said too that in order to raise well the dough should be kept in a warm place. So we put it under Uncle Hezzie's bed. And to-morrow, if the dough raises like it should, we're going to start cleaning up. It's Sunday, I know. But, as Friday says, the better the day the better the deed. Anyway, we've got to do it to-morrow, Sunday or no Sunday. For the next day is school. And my ma will be home then.

We've got our work all laid out. Tail Light and I are going to dough the ceiling while Slats and Friday mop the kitchen floor. We're going to tidy up my room too, and wash all the dirty dishes.

I can't ever fix up that burnt rug. But everything else in the house is going to look beautiful when my ma gets home. So maybe I won't get such a bad scolding after all.

CHAPTER XIV

MOUNTAINS OF SNOW

October 27—Slats and Tail Light went home to-day. Their pa came after them when Tail Light and I were doughing the ceiling of Uncle Hezzie's room. So I had to finish the job all by myself. And it sure looks "finished" all right! Oh, oh! I'm sorry now that I ever started it. For the dough didn't do a bit of good. If anything the ceiling looks worse than ever. It's got dough bumps all over it, like pimples on a squash. And Uncle Hezzie's newest complaint is that the dough keeps dropping down on top of him as he lays in his bed. Every time he opens his mouth to yawn, he says, he gets a hunk of dough in his throat. Gee! Maybe if we built a good hot fire in his room the dough would bake. And then he'd get a shower of biscuits. Not so bad, huh?

I'm convinced now that I got my dough too sticky. Or maybe Uncle Hezzie spoiled it this morning when he jumped out of bed and stuck his bare foot in it. We left it in his room to

raise. For that's what the cook book said—to raise properly, the book said, bread dough had to set all night in a warm place. The only warm place we had was in Uncle Hezzie's room. And the warmest part of the room was under his bed. So that's where we put the bread dough. I still can't figure out how he got his foot in it when the alarm went off. But he did. And when I got there, in my pajamas, he was hopping around the room like a one-legged jumping jack.

"Thunderation!" he boomed, in his ear-splitting way. "Who put that confounded jellyfish under my bed?"

"It isn't a jellyfish," says I. "It's bread dough."

And having rescued the dough, I told him what it was for. I was going to dough the ceiling of his room, I said.

"Thunderation!" he boomed again. "*Bread* dough! An' *me* with my foot in it. A *master,* mind you."

Slats came in then. And between us we finally got the excited old man back into bed.

The room was like an ice box. For the fire had been out for hours. And afraid that the old seaman would get a chill, we hurriedly filled the stove with kindling and touched a match to it.

"What shall I do now?" says Slats. "Go downstairs for some oak chunks?"

"I think you better," says I, "if we want to keep the fire going. But for Pete's sake don't bring up any of that green wood. For we've had enough excitement around here for the present."

Friday came in to warm himself beside the snapping stove.

"When do we start the big battle?" says he.

"I've got to take care of Uncle Hezzie first," says I.

"What's the matter with him?" whispered Friday, as he peeked across the room. "Has he got water on the brain?"

"No," I whispered back, "he's got dough on the leg."

That set Friday to giggling. And pretty soon I got to giggling too. So we went out in the hall.

"How did he happen to step in the dough pan?" says Friday.

"Search me," says I.

"Gee! I bet he looked funny—jumping around on one leg."

"Quit talking about it," says I, "or I'll bust."

Slats was laboring up the stairs with an armful of wood. And just as he came to the top step I got a call from the invalid.

"Bring up along-side, matey," says he. "I want to ax you something."

"Ay, ay, sir," says I, in regular seaman style.

"How reads the barometer this mornin'?" says he.

"Stormy," says I.

"Still snowin', heh?"

"Snowing and blowing both," says I.

"Weather like this," says he, with a drawn look on his wrinkled face, "is bad fur a creakin' ol' craft like me. It loosens the j'ints an' starts 'em to achin'. But I've withstood fiercer gales, lad. An' I'll withstand this one too, if you lend me a hand now and then."

I felt kind of guilty. For he never would have jumped out of bed that way if it hadn't been for my crazy alarm. And wanting to square myself I warmed some water and carried it up to his room in the dish pan.

"Let's have your lame leg," says I briskly, "and I'll give it a bath."

Friday came along and peeked over my shoulder.

"What's that between the toes?" says he, as the invalid painfully extended his hairy leg over the edge of the bed.

"Dough," says I.

That brought a giggle.

"Gosh! I thought it was dirt."

"Maybe I better save it," says I.

"I would if I were you," says Friday. "And there's more up there on his ankle."

But when I started picking at the dough the old man set up an awful roar.

"Thunderation!" he boomed. "What mought you be doin' down thar anyway?—stickin' needles in me? Thar's misery enough in that j'int, lad, without you addin' to it. So ease off, I tell you, an' be lively about it."

But I hated like the dickens to lose all that good dough. So I kept up picking. And pretty soon I got a biff on the head.

"Dash my buttons!" the old man boomed in his fiercest manner. "Do I have to yell at you for a week to make you hear me? Ease off, I say. Or by the powers of ol' Davey Jones hisself I'll put you athwart my knee an' polish you off with my cane."

Friday laughed right out then.

"Go ahead," says he eagerly. "I'd like to see you do that."

"Yes," scowled the cranky old seaman, "an' I know someone else 'round here who'll git a taste of that cane if thar hain't less commotion in the hold. Thunderation! Pots on the galley stairs an' bread dough under the bed! Now, what could beat that fur nonsense?"

I dabbled with the wash rag.

"How about your neck and ears?" says I. "Do you want me to wash them too?"

"Oh, me, oh, my!" says he, in a changed pitiful voice. "To be laid up like this an' not able

even to scrub my own neck an' ears. But that's what we all git in our old age. An' I ought to be thankful, I s'pose, that I've got a lad on deck who's willin' to fetch an' carry. But it's hard on the pride, an' you can lay to that. A master, with his foot in a pan of bread dough one minute an' flat on his back the next! Yes, yes, lad, a little soap an' water on the uppers as well as the lowers. An' then, if it mought further please your fancy, a great big bowl of pipin' hot coffee. *Hot,* mind you, an' black as the ace of spades."

I figured he ought to have something besides coffee. So I named over a few things that I could cook for him. And when I got through I had an order for toast, pancakes, fried onions and a pick-a-lily.

"What in heck is a pick-a-lily?" says Slats, when I showed him the list. "Some kind of a flower?"

"I've heard of tiger lilies," says I thoughtfully.

"And calla lilies," says Slats.

Calla lilies!

"For the love of mud!" says I quickly. "He *would* kick the bucket in short order if we brought him a dish of calla lilies."

"What does he want with a pick-a-lily?" says Slats. "Is he going to eat it?"

"I guess so," says I. "Anyway he put it on the list."

"Maybe I better look it up in the dictionary," says Slats. "For we don't want to put his digestive organs on the bum. And that might happen if we gave him the wrong thing."

Friday and Tail Light were yappin at us to get our fort fixed up. So I hung a thick blanket over Uncle Hezzie's door, to deaden the noise, and then the fun began.

Bang! bang! bang! bang!

"Hurray for the Yanks!" yelled Slats, as one of our flying pillows caught little Tail Light under the chin and knocked him halfway down the stairs.

Friday started toward us with a soggy mop.

"Over the top!" he screeched.

Gosh! I never dreamed that he'd actually swish that dirty old mop in our faces. But he did.

"I'll teach you to hide all the pillows on us," he roared. "Thought you had us licked, huh? Come on Tail Light. What's the matter with you? Grab a broom and knock their blocks off."

Slats and I separated then. And coming at the mop swisher from both sides we quickly got him down and disarmed him.

Then along came Tail Light. But instead of attacking us with a broom, as ordered, he started shaking pepper at us.

Suffering cats! I thought for a minute or two that I'd sneeze my head off.

Ker-*choo-o-o!* Ker-*choo-o-o!* Ker-*choo-o-o!*

Everybody was sneezing now, even Tail Light himself. So we decided to call it a draw. And dressing, I hurried down to the kitchen to get breakfast ready.

"Well," says I, as Slats came up behind me, "did you find out what kind of a flower a pick-a-lily is?"

"It isn't a flower at all," says he. "It's spelt p-i-c-c-i-l-i-l-l-i. And the dictionary says it's a pickle."

"A *pickle?*" says I. Then I laughed. "And we thought it was some kind of a posey."

"What kind of pickles have you got?" says Slats.

"Everything from crabapples to cucumbers," says I.

"I guess I'll put them all together," says he, "and chop them up. Then he'll have a little of everything."

"And while you're doing that," says I, "I'll finish frying the onions."

"Oof!" says Slats, turning up his nose. "I can think of a good many things that I'd rather have for breakfast besides fried onions."

"You and me both," says I. "But orders are orders."

I had the onion pan on one of the gas-stove burners. The coffee pan was on another. And

Friday used the other two for the big pancake griddle.

Talk about a busy place! I doubt if my ma ever turned out a meal any faster than we did. And when everything was ready we piled it in the bottom of a wash tub and carried it up to the invalid.

"Thunderation!" he boomed, as we staggered into the room. "Since when did it git to be the custom in this port to lug food around in a side-wheeler?"

"Our tray wasn't big enough to hold it all," says I.

And having fixed the tub so that he could reach everything, I ran downstairs to eat my own breakfast.

Slats was sitting on the edge of the kitchen sink with a big hunk of cake in his hands.

"Did you notice the snow banks, Trigger?" says he.

"I've been too busy," says I.

"Take a look at Miss Potts' house," says he.

So I ran to the window.

"Where's her grape arbor?" says I wonderingly.

"It's all covered up with snow," says Slats.

Friday spoke up then.

"What does Uncle Hezzie think about the weather?" says he.

"He says it's going to ease up before night," says I.

And it did too. There isn't a particle of wind now. But the snow banks! Oh, oh! They're as high as mountains. And how the snow plows will ever get through, to clear the streets, is a riddle to me. For there's one drift out in front of our house that's higher than the porch roof itself.

I'm hoping now that the roads will stay blocked for several days. Then we won't have to go to school. Still, I'd like awfully well to have my ma come home. For I'm getting tired of waiting on Uncle Hezzie. It seems to me that every time I go near him he's got something for me to do. First it's his lame leg. Then it's his empty stomach. Gee-miny crickets! I never saw such an eater in all my life. I've already put down what he had for breakfast. We had to carry it up to him in a wash tub. When noon came he ordered even more. And to-night he tapered off with another tubful. Gosh! If he doesn't puff up and bust before morning it will be a wonder.

Everything is nice and neat in the lower part of the house. For Friday scrubbed the kitchen floor this morning on his hands and knees. He and Slats washed all of the dirty dishes too. And then they went from room to room with wiping clothes.

"What do you want us to do with all these onions?" Friday called up the stairs.

"Take them down cellar," I called back.

"O-k," says he.

In the same thorough way Tail Light and I worked like nailers to clean up the top part of the house. First we tidied up my own bedroom. Then one of us swept the hall while the other one cleaned up the bath room. And then I tackled the biggest job of all, after telling Tail Light to stand around and wait on me.

Gosh! If you've never tried to dough a ceiling you have no idea how tiresome it is. I thought my arms would drop out of their sockets. First I tried standing on a soap box. But that was too low, so I got a stepladder. And finally I worked on a table board stretched across the backs of two chairs. That gave me a chance to move around a little bit. But once I moved too far. And when poor Uncle Hezzie saw me coming down on top of him, dough pan and all, I thought he'd screech his lungs out. But I didn't mess him up half as bad as he expected. And having scraped the dough out of his hair I straightened the table board and went back to my work.

Being an old salt I thought it would cheer him up if I sang some lively sea songs. So I started in with "Columbia the Gem of the Ocean." And when I came to the end of that

song I tackled "My Bonnie Lies Over the Ocean." But instead of singing it in the regular way, I ripped it out like this:

Last night as I lay on my pillow,
Last night as I lay on my bed,
I stuck my feet out of the window
And now all my neighbors are dead.

I thought maybe Uncle Hezzie would be lulled to sleep by the time I came to the last line. So I ended up sort of low and quivering-like. Regular grand-opera stuff. And it was then, as the dough pan got away from me again and tumbled down on top of the stove, that Mr. Beale floundered into the house with orders from his wife to bring the two family nest eggs home at once.

Slats came upstairs to tell me the bad news.

"Sh-h-h!" says I, as he tumbled into the concert chamber.

"What are you 'sh-h-h-ing' about?" says he.

"I just put Uncle Hezzie to sleep," says I.

"What with?" says Slats. "A brick?"

"Didn't you hear me?" says I modestly.

"I heard something," says he. "But I didn't know whether it was you or a cracked record."

Tail Light thought that was funny.

"Haw! haw! haw!" says he, in his brainless way.

"I've been singing to Uncle Hezzie," says I. "And now he's sound asleep."

"Thunderation!" boomed the old man. "Who says I'm asleep?"

I thought that Slats would bust.

"Well, so-long, Trigger," says he. "I hate to go home. But you know my ma."

"Don't forget to take Tail Light with you," says I.

"O-k," says he.

Mr. Beale then came upstairs himself.

"What's the matter with your phone?" says he.

"The wires blew down," says I, as I moved to the other end of my table board.

"Well," says he, "it's a lucky thing that our wires didn't blow down too. For I just got a long-distance call from your ma. She says to tell you that she may not be home for another week or two."

"WHAT?" I gurgled.

And then, as I got a look at that hungry mug of Uncle Hezzie's, I let myself go and landed beside him on the bed.

"Jumpin' Jerusalem!" he roared, at the top of his voice. "If I don't get killed in this house it'll be a wonder."

Mr. Beale looked kind of dizzy.

"What's the matter?" he spoke to me. "Did

you skid? Or is that the way you usually come down?"

"Never mind about me," says I, as Uncle Hezzie kicked me off the bed. "Go ahead and tell me about my ma. What happened to her?"

"It's your pa," says Mr. Beale. "He's got blood poison in his foot. And when your ma phoned they were getting him ready for the hospital."

I didn't care then whether the old ceiling got doughed or not. But after a little bit I got my grit back. If my pa was in a hospital, I told myself, there was no use of me making things worse for my poor ma by acting like a cry baby. She'd see that my pa came out all right. And it was up to me to keep the house going till she got home.

So that's how things stand to-night. The storm is over; we're surrounded by mountains of snow; my pa is probably in a hospital; Friday is sleeping in his own bed; Uncle Hezzie is full of fried onions; and to-morrow is school day.

Oh, dear! I wish I knew where I could hire a couple of good cooks.

CHAPTER XV

HALLOWE'EN

October 28—Whoopee! Uncle Hezzie is out of bed. His knee still hurts him, he says. But he's able to wait on himself. Even better, he's doing all of the cooking. He sure is a peachy old man, all right.

There wasn't any school this morning. But the school bell rang this noon as usual. So Friday and I started out. And did we ever have fun! For half the time we were in snow up to our ears.

Everybody around here seems to think now that the streets will be cleared by to-morrow noon. Already the snow has begun to melt and run away. The newspaper said to-night that we're going to have much warmer weather. Which is a lucky thing for Uncle Hezzie and yours truly. For we're still trying to heat the house with that crazy wood stove.

Oh, yes! the telephone man came to-day and put up our wires. And right away I got a long-distance call from my ma. My pa was getting

along swell, she said. But it would be dangerous to move him for several days at least.

"Do you miss me, Trigger?" says she.

"*And* how," says I. "But don't worry about me."

"I can't help it," says she.

It was on the tip of my tongue to tell her that Uncle Hezzie was here. But I checked myself in time. For it suddenly popped into my head that she might worry all the more if she knew I had company.

Anyway she'll find out all about it when she gets home.

October 29—A week ago to-night it was nice and warm outside. Then we got that terrible blizzard. And now we're having another touch of summer, just like the newspaper said.

The snow is melting almost as fast as it came. There's puddles everywhere. And over by Betty Sharpe's house the water is a foot deep.

Friday and I stopped there to-night, when school was out, to sail boats. And when Betty came along, with an armful of school books, she ridiculed us. Only little babies, she said, with her nose in the air, would play with sticks in a mud puddle.

Friday gave me a nudge.

"Now's your chance," says he, in that giggly way of his.

"What do you mean?" says I.

"She won't be able to get across the puddle unless she jumps. So why don't you put your jacket down, like Sir Walter Raleigh, and make a bridge for her?"

Betty was scowling now.

"This is my puddle," says she, in her superior way. "And I want you boys to keep out of it."

"How about that little corner over there?" I pointed. "Is that yours too?"

"Yes, it is," she snapped back. "And the sooner you leave here the better I'll like it."

I felt like giving her a shove. But instead I picked up my boat and started off.

"Come on," says I, to Friday. "There's another puddle over there by Miss Potts' house."

"Yes," Betty spoke quickly, "and that's my puddle too. For one time Miss Potts said I could have all of the puddles in front of her house."

Suffering cats!

"Anyway," says I, "I own the Atlantic ocean. For my uncle gave it to me."

Mrs. Sharpe was standing on the front porch.

"Be careful, dear," she called to Betty, "that you don't get your feet wet."

"Watch me, mamma," Betty called back. "I'm going to jump."

"Yes," says I, under my breath, "and I hope you skid too."

I never dreamed that she would. But she did! And when she went down kersplash! in the middle of that icy puddle, with her school-books all around her, I thought I'd bust.

Friday ran into the puddle and helped her up.

"Gee!" says he. "I'm sorry you slipped."

"It was him," cried Betty, jabbing her finger at me. "He made me slip. And I'm glad now that I didn't invite him to my party. For he's nothing but a great big rowdy."

"Bah!" says I. "If anybody happens to ask you, I've already got an invitation to your old party."

"You have not," she cried, as she stood there with the water dripping from her dress.

"I have too," I yelled back. "I got an invitation from Mrs. Clarkey herself."

"I don't believe it."

"All right," says I. "You'll find out to-morrow night."

Mrs. Sharpe was running around the puddle like an old setting hen with baby ducks.

"Don't stand there in that icy water, Betty. Goodness gracious, child! You'll get your death of cold. Help her pick up her books, Friday. That's a good boy. As for you," she turned and glared at me, "I wish you'd go home and stay there. For Betty hasn't a moment's peace when you're around."

"Yes," Betty then spoke for herself with flashing eyes, as Friday helped her out of the puddle, "and if you *dare* to come to my party to-morrow night, I'll scratch your eyes out."

"Betty, Betty!" cried Mrs. Sharpe. "You mustn't talk that way. It isn't ladylike. Come now. Let's go to the house."

Miss Potts stopped me on the way home.

"What happened to Betty?" says she, in that nosey way of hers.

"She sat down in a puddle of water," says I.

"Humph! I bet you shoved her."

I don't know why it is that everybody blames me when something happens. And it makes me good and sore.

"I wish someone would shove *you* in a puddle," I told Miss Potts. And scowling, I tried to pass her. But she stopped me.

"I see you've got company," says she.

"Well, what of it?" I growled.

"Relative?" says she, in that inquisitive way of hers.

"I guess so."

"When did he arrive?" she followed up.

"Friday night."

"And did your ma send for him to keep you company?"

"No," I shook my head. "She doesn't even know that he's here."

"Oh-h-h!" the word was stretched out sort

of surprised-like. "Is that so? . . . Walks with a cane, doesn't he?"

"Most of the time," I grunted.

"Married?" says she.

"No," I shook my head again. "He's an old bachelor."

"Oh-h-h!" says she again. "How interesting."

And then she ran into the house, telling me to wait till she got back.

"Here's some quince jelly," says she, upon her return. "I made it myself. And I *do* hope that your visitor will like it."

Well, say! I thought I'd bust. For I saw right off what she was up to. Having learned that our visitor was an old bachelor she already had set her cap for him.

Uncle Hezzie acted kind of surprised when I told him that one of the neighbor ladies had sent him a glass of quince jelly.

"Humph!" says he, as he squinted at the unexpected gift. "What kind of nonsense is this?"

"She made it herself," I grinned.

Later the ambitious husband-hunter brought us over a cream cake. And what do you know if she didn't have her nose powdered!

"I just *knew* that you were an old sea captain," she told Uncle Hezzie, as she sat beside the ice box and beamed at him sort of willing-like. "For there's something about you that

harks of bounding billows and romantic sunsets."

Gosh! She sure was a quick worker, all right!

"Now, if there's *anything* I can do to make your visit more enjoyable," says she, with another one of those I'm-yours-for-the-asking smiles, "all you have to do is to call on me. Trigger dear knows where I live—in case you should want to drop in some evening. I have a telephone too. And if something comes up, all you need to do is to give me a ring."

Trigger dear! That was a new one.

"What mought be the matter with her?" growled Uncle Hezzie, when I finally got rid of her. "Did somebody vaccinate her with a talkin'-machine needle?"

I laughed.

"She's in love with you," says I.

"Rubbish," says he.

Then to my surprise he asked me where Goblin Hollow was. And to-night, when he was getting ready for bed, I caught him taking greenbacks out of a small brass box that he carries in the bottom of his traveling bag. Gee! I wouldn't be surprised if he's got a thousand dollars with him. Or maybe he's got two thousand dollars in that money box of his, or even *ten* thousand!

But what was his idea in asking me about Goblin Hollow? That's the thing that puzzles

me. Does he know about the Magic Circle? And is it his intention to do something to it?

I thought sure that I'd hear from Mrs. Clarkey to-day. For she said that she was going into the tunnel herself just as soon as the weather cleared up. I guess though the snow is holding her back. Gee! I wonder if Uncle Hezzie *is* mixed up in that crazy mystery? Come to think of it, he *did* show up here sort of sudden-like.

For two cents I'd skip school to-morrow and keep an eye on him. But how can I work it? I guess I'll go to bed now and think it over.

October 30 (Before the party)—I let on to Uncle Hezzie this morning that I had the stomach ache. But when the school bell rang he made me get up as usual. There was nothing better for the stomach ache, he said, with a droll look in his eyes, than exercise. So all I had to do was to run around the house seven times and I'd be all right. But instead of running around the house, as he suggested, I grabbed my books and lit out for the schoolhouse.

The big gyp!

Betty came to school this morning with a red nose. And instead of flourishing it around as usual, every time I looked at her, she kept patting it with a damp handkerchief. To hear her tell it you'd think that I actually built a dam in

front of her house so that she'd have a puddle of water to fall into. She gives me a pain. But if I bump into her to-night at Mrs. Clarkey's house I'm going to be just as nice as I can. For I don't want Mrs. Clarkey herself to get a poor opinion of me.

She called me up to-day to remind me that she had a job for me in her kitchen. So now I'm all dressed to go over there. Slats and Tail Light are going to play games with the other kids. But Friday and I are going to stay in the back part of the house. Gee! After what Mrs. Clarkey told us the other night I feel surer than ever that something is going to happen there to-night. And I wouldn't miss it for anything. That's why I sort of stuck myself in.

The school kids are all excited about the coming party. I heard them talking about it to-day. The house is going to be lit with ghostly green lights. And Mrs. Clarkey has fixed up one of the rooms to look like a graveyard. I understand that Dr. Vett doesn't like it. And when Betty tried to wheedle him into letting her use his fancy skeleton, he told her sharply that he kept the skeleton in his office for medical purposes and not for childish nonsense.

Now that Hallowe'en has come, I suppose he's thinking of that other Hallowe'en in the old Fisher tunnel. Gee! I can imagine how scared Mrs. Clarkey was when the light went out. And

now her brother has her half convinced that the escaped ghost is chasing her around.

Does he really believe that himself? Or is he just trying to scare her? And where does that chisel-faced housekeeper come in? It sure is a muddle, all right. And the more I think about it the dizzier I get. So I guess I'll quit thinking about it for the present and let the mystery take care of itself.

Still, I *would* like to know what Dr. Vett does in his part of the house. And if he's actually working on a ghost lamp, as so many people seem to think, I'd like to see it.

A ghost lamp! Boy, wouldn't I get a jolt to-night if I turned on a lamp like that and something white and vapory-like started oozing around in front of me! And I'd probably get another jolt too (in the seat of the pants!) if Dr. Vett caught me at it.

I thought maybe I could get something out of Uncle Hezzie this noon by telling him about Mrs. Clarkey. She and her husband, I said, used to go all over the country hunting ghosts. And gradually I came to the part about the tunnel. But the old seaman never batted an eye till I told him outright that the tunnel was in Goblin Hollow. And then he just gave me a stony stare.

Eager to get a look at the mushroom man I took a run down there to-night after school. And a queer shivery feeling stole over me as I came

within sight of the closed tunnel. I saw the house that the mushroom man lives in too. It's a stone house, with a steep shingled roof.

As I got closer to the house I caught the murmur of voices. And then, to my amazement, the door swung open and out stomped old Uncle Hezzie himself.

"Thunderation!" he boomed, in his characteristic way. "If you don't take it, an' do as I say, it'll be the worse fur you. Mark that. I don't furgit easy—not me. An' mind you, not a word to the neighbors."

There was another man in the doorway—a smaller man with a twisted back and one of the wickedest faces that I ever had seen in all my life.

"I keep myself locked in," says he, as he glanced sort of furtive-like at the bush in which I was hiding. "If I didn't, it would 'a' got me years ago. For it's a killer."

"Nonsense!" boomed Uncle Hezzie. "I don't believe a word of it. It's all in your head. An' it will be well fur you to quit thinkin' about it."

"But I've *seen* it; I've *seen* it."

The man was all excited now. And he kept clutching at his throat, as though something was choking him.

I felt it was time for me to move. And I tried to get away without being seen. But the moving bushes drew the mushroom man's at-

tention. And with one of the awfullest screams that I ever heard in all my life, he dashed into the house and slammed the door behind him. After which everything around the lonely dreary-looking house became as silent as a tomb.

Uncle Hezzie walked off then, sort of shaking his shaggy head and muttering to himself. I caught up with him a few blocks away. But when I tried to quiz him he just looked at me in that stony way of his.

I'll have to stop now, for I can hear Friday yapping at the front door. I can hear Uncle Hezzie too. He's mumbling to himself in his room. He seems all upset to-night. And there's a sort of desperate daring look in his narrowed eyes.

He acted kind of glad when I told him that I was going to a party. So I wouldn't be a bit surprised if he went out himself after I leave.

But where will he go? Back to Goblin Hollow?

Gee!

CHAPTER XVI

TRAPPED!

October 31—Well, I know everything now. I know all about that ghost lamp of Dr. Vett's. I know the truth about the tunnel ghost too. Strange things have happened around here during the past twenty-four hours. The town is still talking about it. And as I look back the wonder is to me that I've still got my own wits.

My Uncle Ben says that my diaries are funny. But there's nothing funny about the stuff that I'm going to write down now. I couldn't giggle to-night for a peck of gumdrops. My giggles have all got icicles on them. They froze up last night in that eerie old tunnel. There was something hiding there, Doc Fosse said—something that had wrecked a man's reason. And when we found the *thing* that we were looking for, we shot it between the eyes.

Mrs. Clarkey had planned to go into the tunnel secretly. For she thought that an old enemy of hers was hiding there. But there's no need of her going near the tunnel now. For she

knows what came up under the sheet that memorable night, and where the goat disappeared to. And somehow, as I stopped in Goblin Hollow this afternoon, to take a look at Professor Clarkey's grave, I had the feeling that he too was resting easier now that the mystery had been solved.

You'll remember where I left off. Friday was yapping at me to hurry downstairs. And Uncle Hezzie was mumbling to himself like a lost soul. I took a peek at him as I crossed the hall. But he didn't like that. And grabbing his heavy black cane he chased me down the stairs.

"What's the matter with you?" says Friday, as he and I started down the darkened street together. "What makes you so quiet?"

I told him then about my unexpected discoveries in Goblin Hollow. Uncle Hezzie knew the mushroom man, I said. I had seen the two together. And the mushroom man had been paid to do something. He didn't want to do it. He acted kind of panicky about it. And afraid that he might back out, Uncle Hezzie was now getting ready to go back to Goblin Hollow in the dark to make things come out his way.

Friday almost swallowed his tonsils.

"And do you really believe," says he, as we got closer to the old Vett house, "that your uncle actually knows stuff about the buried stove poker?"

"Why not?" says I. "He knows the mushroom man. The mushroom man owns the tunnel. That's where the poker came from. So why shouldn't Uncle Hezzie know all about the poker too?"

"And you're sure," says Friday, as he pulled the mystery around in his mind, "that your uncle really came to town on that show train?"

"That's his story," I nodded.

"Maybe," says Friday, "he got here early in the evening. And maybe it was *him* that buried the stove poker."

"I'd sooner think it was Dr. Vett," says I.

"What did your uncle say when you caught him in Goblin Hollow?" Friday then inquired.

"Nothing. He just stared at me like a stone statue."

"And is it your idea that the mushroom man is an old pirate?"

"He looks like a pirate," says I. "For he's got wicked knife scars all over his face."

"Oh! . ." says Friday, in a peculiar voice.

"What's the matter now?" says I quickly.

"I just happened to think of something. Those aren't knife scars that you saw. They're claw marks. The mushroom man used to be an animal trainer. Slats told me so the other day."

"That's right," says I. "Slats told me the same thing. But I had forgotten all about it."

"I don't know much about animal training," says Friday. "But I suppose the mushroom man lost his nerve when he got clawed up. So he took up mushroom farming instead."

"But how did Uncle Hezzie get to know him?" says I.

"I wonder," says Friday.

"I'd hate to think," says I, sort of worried-like, "that Uncle Hezzie would do anything mean. But he's certainly trying to crowd that mushroom man into something."

"Does your uncle believe in spirits?" Friday then inquired.

"I never asked him."

"I suppose he *would* be peeved," mused Friday, "if one of *his* pet spooks was exposed too, along with the rest."

"No," I shook my head. "I don't think that Uncle Hezzie is sore at Mrs. Clarkey—if that's what you've got on your mind. For I quizzed him about her to-day. And he just as much as told me that he never had heard of her, or her husband either."

"Does he know Dr. Vett?"

"I don't think so."

"But he *does* know the mushroom man, huh?" Friday persisted.

I nodded.

"And the mushroom man," says I, "owns

the cave that the stove poker came out of. So there you are."

"But what made the mushroom man scream when he saw you fiddling around in his bushes?"

"That's what I'd like to know."

"Was it a mean scream?"

"No. It was a scared scream. He acted for all the world as though something that I couldn't see was trying to choke him to death."

"Something that you couldn't see!" Friday spoke in a slow awed voice. "And Dr. Vett told his sister that she was being haunted by something that *she* couldn't see. Gee-miny crickets, Trigger! If this keeps on I'll begin to believe that there *is* an invisible spirit snooping around here. It got loose in the tunnel. And now it can't get back into spirit-land where it belongs."

Br-r-r-r!

"If you start talking that way," says I, "I'll shake in my shoes."

A kid that we knew yipped at us to slow up. He was on his way to the party. But instead of following him to the front door, where the guests were being received, Friday and I ran around the house to the back door.

Mrs. Clarkey let us in.

"I was just beginning to think," says she, "that you had decided to stay at home."

"I wish they had," the housekeeper spoke ungraciously, as she moved moodily in the background.

Mrs. Clarkey laughed.

"Did you hear that, boys?" she spoke gaily. "Maggie thinks you're going to be more of a hindrance than a help. But possibly we can change her mind."

Friday yanked off his coat and rolled up his shirt sleeves.

"What do you want us to do first?" says he.

"And you're quite sure," says Mrs. Clarkey, as she searched our eyes in turn, "that you'd rather spend your evening in the kitchen?"

I saw what she meant. In accepting our help, she thought all the time that she could fix it up with Betty at the last moment and get us to go in where the other kids were. Liking us, she wanted us to have as much fun as the rest.

But I wouldn't budge. No, sir-ee! It was Betty's party, I said. And I had no right to force myself in. I told too how she had threatened to scratch my eyes out. Mrs. Clarkey still thought, I guess, that it was nothing more than a childish squabble. But she quit urging the matter. And having put us to work making sandwiches, she went off to another part of the big house.

The servant eyed us distastefully.

"If you thought you weren't wanted here," she spoke sharply, "why did you come?"

"Oh, because," says I.

"Humph!" she grunted. "I wasn't in favor of the party in the first place. Nor the doctor either. For we don't believe in making light of such things. Death is a serious matter. And yet half of the children who came here to-night expect to see a real ghost."

She stooped over to pick up a broom. And as she straightened, and started across the kitchen, my heart almost jumped out of my throat. For I had recognized in her cat-like movements the same peculiar movements of the poker hider.

Friday was watching me with puzzled eyes.

"What's the matter with you?" he spoke anxiously. "Are you sick?"

"Let's go outside," I spoke in return.

"I wish you'd both go home," growled the unfriendly servant.

Yes, and I knew *why* she wanted us to go home. She was afraid of us. She had a secret. And she was afraid that we'd find it out.

"What do you want?" says Friday, when the door closed behind us.

I told him then of my latest discovery. It wasn't Dr. Vett who had buried the stove poker, I said. It was the disguised housekeeper herself.

"I bet Dr. Vett told her to do it," says Friday.

"No," I shook my head. "I don't believe Dr. Vett knows anything about it. It's *her*. She's

got it in for Mrs. Clarkey—those mean looks prove it. And if we don't do something pretty quick there's liable to be a murder around here."

"All right, Sherlock Holmes," laughed Friday. "What shall we do first?—go in and get a print of somebody's big toe?"

"For two cents," says I, "I'd go right to Dr. Vett himself."

"But he and the housekeeper are old cronies," says Friday.

"That's all right too," says I. "But I don't think that Dr. Vett wants his sister to be murdered. He's a dupe. That spiritualist woman duped him. And now this other woman is duping him. So why not tell him the truth?"

"I wonder—" says Friday, sort of dreamy-like.

"What?" says I quickly.

"I wonder if that spiritualist and the housekeeper aren't related? The spiritualist got a bump. Professor Clarkey gave it to her. That ruined her business. So she got one of her relatives to come here and get even. See?"

"Friday," says I admiringly, "when the angels put you together up in heaven they certainly didn't scrimp on the brains."

"Well," says he, in his jolly way, "one of us has got to have brains."

"Shall we go tell Dr. Vett?" says I abruptly.

"Let's," says he.

So we went around the house to the office door. And what do you know if we didn't bump into Tail Light. He was rolling an apple with a spoon.

"I'm a pig," says he.

"Of course," says I. "Everybody in the neighborhood knows that. And if you weren't dumb too you'd pick up that apple and eat it, instead of pushing it around with a spoon."

"I've got to push it," says he. "It's a forfeit. We were playing 'pig.' And when I got the 'pig' card they made me do this."

Friday cocked his ears.

"Are the kids having a good time?" says he, as a burst of laughter reached us.

"Br-r-r-r!" says Tail Light, letting on that he had a chill. "You ought to see what they've got in there. Ghosts and tombstones and everything else. I shook hands with one of them too."

"What?" says I lightly. "One of the tombstones?"

"No. One of the ghosts. And then it kissed me in the dark."

"Tut, tut!" says I sharply. "I'm ashamed of you, Tail Light. A little squirt like you. And I suppose it was some grass widow with a sheet over her head."

He giggled.

"It was Betty Sharpe herself," he bragged.

"Well," says I, "she showed good sense when she turned out the light. For if I had to kiss you I'd want to do it in the dark too."

"What's Slats doing?" Friday then inquired.

"He's a pig too," says Tail Light. "But instead of making him roll an apple around the house, like me, they locked him up with a skeleton."

"A skeleton?" I spoke quickly. "What skeleton?"

"It's in there," Tail Light pointed to the office.

I started for the door.

"Come on," I signaled to Friday.

The kids were laughing harder than ever now. We could hear them clapping too. And then as Friday followed me through the office door, and I closed it behind us, we were shut in by the eerie silence of Dr. Vett's private quarters.

The land of ghosts, so to speak!

Crossing the dimly lighted office I tapped on an inner door. And just as I expected I heard Slats' voice.

"Open up," says he.

So I turned the key in the lock.

"What the dickens! . . ." says he, as he got a peek at us. "Where in heck did you guys come from?"

"We're looking for Dr. Vett," says I.

"Well, he isn't here."

"Who locked you in?" says I curiously.

"Oh, that crazy gang in the other part of the house. They thought I'd be afraid to set in the same room with a skeleton. But it didn't feaze me."

Friday crossed the room and peeked up the tiny circular staircase that I told about in an earlier chapter.

"Is the old guy up there?" came the whispered inquiry.

"No," Slats shook his head. "He's gone out to find Doc Fosse."

"I never knew," says I, "that he and Doc Fosse worked together."

"They don't, as a rule. But something special came up, I guess."

Friday took another peek up the circular stairs.

"Gee!" he spoke longingly. "I wish I had the nerve to go up there. For that's where the ghost lamp is, I bet. And I'd like to see it."

"You and me both," says I.

Slats laughed.

"Go on," he urged. "I'll watch the door."

So Friday and I tiptoed up the stairs. And all the time I had the feeling that something with cold snaky fingers was getting ready to grab me by the ankles. Br-r-r-r! It sure was a spooky place, all right.

The room at the head of the stairs was filled with funny looking electrical machines and all kinds of queer laboratory truck. We saw rows and rows of big glass bottles too. And over everything hung a sort of dead drug-like smell. It was sickening.

"Let's get out of here," I shivered.

"But I thought you wanted to see what a ghost looked like," says Friday, as he stopped beside one of the peculiar machines.

"No, no," I cried, giving his arm a jerk. "Don't touch it. For some kinds of light kills people. I read about it in a book."

Slats started up the stairs.

"The kids are coming," he warned us.

So we ducked back out of sight.

Betty was in the lead. And did I ever shiver in my shoes as she and her gabby gang tumbled into the lower room. For I knew blamed well what she'd tell me if she got her eyes on me.

"Who unlocked the door?" says she, in her squeaky voice.

"You'd be surprised," laughed Slats.

"Was it the doctor himself?" Betty followed up.

"No," says Slats, "it wasn't the doctor, nor the baker, nor the candle-stick maker."

Another kid tumbled into the room.

"You better get out of here," he cried. "For

Dr. Vett and Dr. Fosse are coming up the path. I just saw them get out of an auto."

"Oh! . ." squeaked Betty, in a high key. And away she ran like a wild deer, with the others hot on her heels.

Slats paused in the door.

"If you guys want to get out of there," he spoke excitedly, "you better step on it."

And then, as heavy double footsteps sounded behind him, he turned and ran away, while Friday and I, at the same time, ducked back into the laboratory.

Boy! I don't mind telling you that I was scared stiff. And the wonder is that I didn't jump out of a window. But Friday sort of quieted me.

"It's a mean trick," he whispered, "to listen in on other people's gab. But I guess we can't help ourselves this time."

I put his hand on my heart.

"Listen to that," says I.

"Mine's thumping too," says he.

"I wish I was home," says I, with a shiver.

There was a murmur of voices in the lower room.

"What are they talking about?" says I.

"Ghosts," says Friday.

I sharpened my ears then. And this is what I heard:

CHAPTER XVII

DR. VETT'S THEORY

October 31 *(Continued)*—"No, sir, Vett," says Doc Fosse, as he stomped into the small library in his fat wheezy way and flopped himself into a big leather chair, "I don't believe a word of it. For it contradicts every known science that I've come in contact with. And I pride myself on my good sense."

"But it's true," persisted Dr. Vett, in a low emotional voice, as he too seated himself in the lower room. "I have the man's word for it. And what object would he have in deceiving me?"

"Humph!" came the short expressive grunt. "I think he's unbalanced myself. And it might not be out of place, Vett, for me to remind you that a lot of people around here have got the same idea about you."

"The opinion of village gossips," Dr. Vett spoke coldly, "doesn't disturb me."

"And you really think, huh," the words were spoken scornfully, "that you can bring the

spiritual and material worlds together with that electrical thing-a-ma-bob of yours?"

"I do, for a fact. And to-night I expect to prove it to you. That's why I brought you here."

"Folderol!"

"You and I never were very intimate, Fosse, notwithstanding the fact that we got our training in the same college and now are practicing in the same town. When we were in college together you had your clique and I had mine. Since then we've followed our own separate paths, each taking to the things he liked best. I have no particular love for you. In fact, to share your frankness, there are times when you positively bore me. You're so—so ordinary minded. You have no imagination. But that doesn't alter the fact that we *are* classmates. We've had similar training. And so I've called you in to-night to assist me, and to glory with me, in the crowning experiment of my lifetime."

"Just what do you propose doing?" came the slightly anxious inquiry.

"When Elmer Dunn gets here I'm going to let the thing that is haunting him follow him into my laboratory. For it will! And then I'm going to trap it with my filter lamp by absorbing the light rays of every other object in the room. The earthly objects will thus be made to

vanish. And so the spiritual objects will stand out in bold relief. For the first time in the whole history of the world, Fosse, you and I are going to see a living breathing spirit."

"Let me ask you a question, Vett. There's been a lot of talk around town about a Hallowe'en séance that you put on in the old Fisher tunnel in Goblin Hollow, where Dunn lives. I've heard too that a supposed spirit got away from you that night. Is it true?"

"Yes," came the short reply.

"And is that where you first got the idea that there was an invisible spook prowling around the neighborhood?"

"No. The belief in spirits is an old one with me, dating back to my college days. The accepted traditions of death and the supposed hereafter seemed utterly inconsistent to me. It was far more probable, I told myself, that the material and spiritual worlds were one and the same thing, separated only by a barrier of invisibility. In short, it was my belief that we all live in the midst of countless spiritual bodies. I traveled the world over to prove my theories. I've witnessed some strange sights. But the most substantial proof of all was obtained that night in the tunnel."

"You really believe that, huh?"

"I most certainly do."

"A lot of people think you put on the séance just to get even with your brother-in-law."

"What do you mean?" the words were spoken sharply.

"Well," came the blunt reply, "you *did* have a rather tricky companion with you that night, if all the stories that I've heard about the séance are true."

"Madam Altura was a born psychic," Dr. Vett defended. "And if she had followed a course of her own she might have been an outstanding figure in the occult world to-day. But unfortunately she stooped to trickery, like so many of her kind of lesser natural ability, in order to dramatize her talents. So her reputation was ruined."

"Where is she now?"

"I don't know. She went into hiding after the tunnel séance. And I haven't heard a word from her since."

"So! She went into hiding, huh? And yet she supposedly redeemed herself that night. A bit inconsistent, don't you think?"

"Madam Altura suffered a very humiliating exposure in this house, as you may have heard. My bigoted brother-in-law was back of that. The woman insisted though that she could actually materialize a spirit under the condition laid down in the famous Black Book. So a Magic Circle was prepared in the old Fisher

tunnel. And when Hallowe'en came, we went there in the dead of night. The prescribed fires were lighted; the cloth was spread; and the promised materialization actually resulted—though in a somewhat incomplete form. There was an unscheduled interruption—the one light that should have been kept burning throughout the materialization was extinguished by a draft. And when the lights were restored, both the goat, from which the spirit had been materialized, and the spirit itself had vanished."

Doc Fosse gave a disgusted grunt.

"Do you know what I think about that?" says he.

"What?"

"I think the whole thing was a great big fake. And that's why the woman and her husband skinned out. They had set your brother-in-law to wondering. But they knew that sooner or later he'd show them up, just as he did when she put on that cabinet trick of hers in your house. So they've been keeping out of sight ever since."

"I have an entirely different theory, Fosse. I think that Madam Altura's exposure in this house so upset her that she had to abandon her work. The tunnel séance was a final supreme effort."

Doc Fosse cleared his throat.

"All right, all right. I won't argue the mat-

ter with you. But you've got a big job on your hands to convince me that Elmer Dunn is now being haunted by the same spirit that got away from you that night in the tunnel."

"Did Dunn ever consult you, Fosse?"

"Yes. But when he started telling me about his illusions, I told him to go home and clear up his conscience."

"He came to me about a month ago. And you can appreciate my elation when he told me that he was being haunted by something that he couldn't see. Here, I told myself, was the very man I needed for my concluding experiments. But when I tried to get him into my laboratory, he became frightened and ran away. Since then I have greatly improved my filter lamp. I can now absorb all of the primary and secondary colors of the prism. But the spirits themselves are too clever to get within range of my lamp. You don't believe it, Fosse. And no amount of talk on my part could convince you. But it's true nevertheless that we *are* completely surrounded by countless invisible spiritual bodies. And the reason why they're invisible is because they lack color; or, to put it another way, they possess a spiritual color that the human eye cannot detect. It is easy to magnify an insect if the insect itself has been caught and placed under the lens. But what luck would a naturalist have if he had to depend on the insect com-

ing to the lens of its own accord? So it is with me. Unable to see the spirits that I'm dealing with, I can't very well herd them in front of my lamp. But— And here's the part that elates me. I'm dealing with a spirit now, through Elmer Dunn, that is different. It is the spirit that Madam Altura materialized in the tunnel. And to disclose it—to bring it out in bold relief—I have only to get Dunn into my laboratory."

"But why should the spirit follow *him* around?" Doc Fosse inquired.

"Why does a dog follow its master?" came the counter question. "Dunn owns the tunnel in which the materialization took place. He works there days with his mushroom beds. So why shouldn't the uneasy spirit, separated from others of its kind, seek his companionship? It's the most natural thing in the world."

"And you say Dunn is coming here to-night?"

"Yes. I had a long talk with him this morning. He fears the spirit himself. It seeks his life, he says. And convinced now that I can help him to get rid of it, he has promised to subject himself to-night to my concluding experiments."

"And you really expect to trap the spirit?"

"I do for a fact."

"Well," Doc Fosse spoke bluntly, "you haven't convinced me yet that you know what

you're talking about. I think it's all a lot of hooey. But I'll stick and see it out."

Dr. Vett then got to his feet.

"A thing without color!" he spoke dreamily, as he paced the room. "Truly an intriguing problem. We identify things by their shape and color. Our eyes have been thus trained through the thousands of years that mankind has had eyes. But what would happen if our eyes, so trained, suddenly encountered something that had no color—something, for instance, from a spiritual world? Would the object appear as a blur?—a mere shadow? Or would it be completely invisible? There is where I began, Fosse. And now I've been working on the problem for years. It is the one great interest in my life."

"When's Dunn coming?" Doc Fosse inquired.

"At nine o'clock."

"Humph! He better get a shove on himself. For it's two minutes to nine now."

Dr. Vett took to pacing the room again.

"Color," he spoke learnedly, "is the name we use to distinguish various sensations that light of varying rates of vibration gives the human eye. All of the colors that we know are contained in the light we use, both natural and artificial. If a body or object absorbs every kind of light and reflects or transmits red light only, it will appear as a red color. If it absorbs every

kind of light except blue rays, it will appear blue. If more than one kind of light is transmitted or reflected, the object will appear of a color compounded of these different rays of light. There are seven primary colors—red, orange, yellow, green, blue, indigo and violet—although in reality there is an enormous, if not an infinite, number of perfectly distinct colors in light. And, of course, as every school child knows, of the seven primary colors mentioned, only three in number, red, green and violet, are primary colors in a strictly scientific sense. These three colors or kind of light cannot be dissolved into any other. White and black should not be considered colors, as a white object reflects and a black object absorbs all of the light rays without separating them, whereas, as I have mentioned, the colors proper are due to separation of the rays of light by partial absorption and reflection or by refraction."

"You sound very academic, Vett," came the dry remark.

"I'll grant," Dr. Vett proceeded, "that my theory is unusual. To you it seems utterly impossible. But having been a student of the supernatural all my life, I'm constrained to concede the possible entrance into this material world, with its known and charted sciences, of a spiritual body on which the science of color, as we understand it, has no effect. And if this

possible body—for instance the body of the spirit that is now haunting Dunn—arouses no color vibrations, how can we say for certain that it will or will not be visible to human eyes?"

"It's after nine, Vett. So you better go hunt up your man, if you expect to make use of him to-night."

"It probably took him longer to get here than he imagined."

"Humph! And he may be home toasting his toes too."

Dr. Vett moved anxiously to a window and searched the path leading to the lighted street. Then, as the telephone rang on his desk, he hurriedly crossed the room.

"This is Dr. Vett," he informed crisply.

The room was dead still now. Just like a tomb. And suddenly we heard a scream. It came over the line. There was a crash of broken glass. Then something fell with a dull sickening thud.

Doc Fosse jumped excitedly to his feet.

"Who's that?" he snapped.

"Elmer Dunn."

"What's the matter with him?"

"I don't know. I barely caught his name. And now the line is dead."

"But that wasn't him that screamed."

"No. It was a child."

"Well," snapped Doc Fosse, "don't stand there like a fool. He wouldn't 'a' called you up if he didn't need you. So get your case and go take care of him, as you should."

But Dr. Vett seemed unable to move.

"It was the one chance that I had to prove my theories. But the spirits have defied me. And now they are mocking me."

"Mocking you? What do you mean?"

"There's a new spirit in their midst. It is the spirit of Elmer Dunn himself. The mushroom man is dead."

CHAPTER XVIII

TWO GREEN EYES

October 31 *(Continued)*—That talk of Dr. Vett's about color refraction, and the other stuff that he dished out, was almost too deep for me. But I got a general idea of what he meant. For I knew how a red mark vanished if you looked at it through a red glass. In much the same way, I guess, he planned to make everything vanish that had color. And at the same time he had the crazy idea that when one set of objects vanished another set, from another world, would take their place.

Dr. Fosse didn't believe it. And I didn't believe it. But, even so, I couldn't keep from shivering as I thought of what might happen to me if the crazy machines behind me suddenly got to showing off.

Then came the exciting telephone call. Something had tackled the mushroom man in his lonely home and killed him. He had managed to get to the telephone and give his name. But that was all. Now he was dead. And it was Dr. Vett's

further crazy belief that a haunting spirit had committed the crime.

All this, mixed up with the stove-poker stuff, made a mystery that completely baffled me. I couldn't get head nor tail of it. Of course, there was nothing very mysterious about Dr. Vett himself. He was just a nut with a one-track mind. Maybe he *did* have a color juggling machine. But it wasn't anything to wonder at. Nor was his belief in spirits at all unusual. The housekeeper had the same belief. Or so she pretended. And I had been led to believe that she and the lamp maker got together and talked things over. Now I knew that the woman was playing a secret part. She was mixed up in the tunnel séance. And so was Uncle Hezzie. For he had known the mushroom man. And it was from the mushroom man's tunnel that the stove poker had been taken.

Like Friday, I thoroughly believed now that the mean-faced housekeeper was planning to do something to Mrs. Clarkey. But I still couldn't figure out why the stove poker had been taken from the tunnel and buried under the walnut tree in Mrs. Clarkey's yard. Oddly too the belief was forced on me that the scheming housekeeper had actually wanted us to see her bury the poker. For she knew that we were going to be there that night. And yet she had tried to fool us with a lot of phoney whiskers.

But of this much I was certain—if the mushroom man had been struck down in his own home, it was no spirit that did it. Something he long had feared had closed in on him. And very probably Uncle Hezzie knew what that something was.

I never dreamed then that Uncle Hezzie himself was actually mixed up in the crime. So I got an awful shock later on, when I found his cane in the Goblin Hollow cottage. There was blood on the cane too. And it was cracked, showing that something had been dealt a terrific blow with it. I remembered then the sounds that we had heard on the telephone—that wild childish scream, and the dull sickening thud of a falling body. The mushroom man had intended to tattle over the telephone. And to shut him up someone behind him, with a heavy black cane, had cracked him on the head.

Oh, it was a terrible moment for me. I felt sick all over. But before I tell you about it, and how I later went with Dr. Fosse into the eerie tomb-like tunnel, I'll explain how Friday and I got out of the laboratory.

Dr. Vett was useless. He acted as though he was paralyzed. So Doc Fosse started off himself in the direction of Goblin Hollow. At the same time Friday and I threw up one of the laboratory windows and slid down a vine to the ground. It was risky stuff, I know. Still, if the

vine had loosened up I doubt if the fall would have banged us up very much. As it was, we reached the ground without a scratch. And cutting across the yard we caught up with Doc Fosse just as he got into his waiting car.

He acted kind of surprised when we told him that we had been hiding in the laboratory. And then, with a queer look at us, he opened the door of the car and we scrambled in.

The car tore down the Elm Street hill to the river, and then turned to the left into the unfrequented Goblin Hollow road. We could see patches of snow. They looked ghostly in the pale moonlight. And then, as we came to the Hollow itself, with its jagged rock piles and tumbled mill ruins, we caught sight of the mushroom man's lighted cottage.

A woman met us at the door. She lived in one of the other stone cottages, she said. Someone had screamed. It sounded like a child. And suspicious of the mushroom man anyway, she had gone outside to investigate. She saw something climb through her neighbor's broken window. It ran into the tunnel. And after it ran a big-bodied man with a peg-leg.

Confident now that a crime of some sort had been committed in the neighboring cottage, the woman and her husband had investigated further. The house owner was picked up under his wall telephone. And at first it was thought that

he was dead. But presently (the spirits didn't know so much after all!) he began to moan. So he was carried to his bed. And since then the helpful couple had made a frantic effort to get in touch with the outside world.

It was then, when I went inside with Doc Fosse, that I found the telltale black cane. Gee! I knew what had happened. The mushroom man had refused to do as Uncle Hezzie had ordered. And down had come the heavy cane on the other man's head.

The room showed the effects of a struggle. For everything was turned upside-down. And it seemed to me that there was blood on everything I touched. But what of the scream that we had heard? Who was the kid that the men apparently were fighting over? And having gotten away through a window, why had the kid scooted into the now open tunnel?

Gee-miny crickets! Could it be possible, I asked myself, that it was a spook after all?

The woman then told us strange things. Years ago, she said, Elmer Dunn had traveled with a circus. He was an animal trainer. A cruel hard man, he had choked one of the animals with his bare hands, after it had jumped on him and seriously clawed his face. Later the idea fixed itself in his guilty mind that the dead animal was haunting him. He could see the tall grass move as the revengeful creature crept to-

ward him. But the animal itself was completely invisible.

A thing without color!

"Oh," cried the woman in conclusion, as she wrung her fat hands, " 'tis hard to believe, I know. But it would seem now that the thing Dunn feared actually happened to-night. There was an animal here. It sprang through that window. For there's broken glass all over the floor. It knocked Dunn down. That's what put the new cuts on his face. And then, as the other man took after it, it went out through the window again."

I had the cane in my hands. And suddenly a great joy stole over me. Maybe I was all wrong about Uncle Hezzie. Maybe he hadn't thumped the other man at all. Maybe it just looked that way.

But where did the strange kid come in? One minute the excited woman said it was a child who crawled out of the broken window. And the next minute she said it was an animal. But of one thing she was sure—it had run into the near-by tunnel. And so had Uncle Hezzie.

It took some time to get the patient bandaged up. And not wanting to be in the way I waited in the kitchen, where I later told Doc Fosse my story.

"Humph!" says he. "I wouldn't do any fretting if I were you. For it wasn't a cane that

knocked Dunn down to-night. It was an animal of some sort. When he gets his senses back—and I can't see that he's in any particular danger—he'll hang to the idea that he was attacked by a spook. So the surest way to set his mind at rest, for all times, is to show him a carcass. Something that he can see is real. And if you boys want to, you can come into the tunnel with me and help me lug the carcass out."

Borrowing a shotgun from the helpful neighbors, Doc then started for the tunnel, with Friday and I tagging at his heels. The mushroom beds that I had heard so much about were just inside the tunnel door. Pretty soon we came to the Magic Circle. And rounding a sharp turn, we came upon Uncle Hezzie.

"Thunderation!" he boomed, in his characteristic way, as our flashlights met. "What mought you young scallawags be doin' here at this time of night? Shiver my timbers! I thought you went off on some kind of merry-makin'. Well!" he raised his booming voice, at the same time thumping the tunnel floor with a club that he had picked up. "Why don't you open your traps an' give an account of yourselves? What are you doin' here? Tell me now, an' be lively about it."

I got him by the hand.

"Gee, Uncle Hezzie!" I spoke, in a kind of quivery voice. "I'm glad."

And then I told him how I had found his cane and how I thought at first that he had cracked the mushroom man over the bean.

"Humph!" says he, in a milder voice, as he gave my hand the same kind of a tight squeeze that I had given him. "So you thought I was a ol' hardshell, huh? Wa'al, lad, that's all right too. I reckon I am more hard-b'iled than some. But I've got a heart nevertheless. An' it was largely to help my ol' friend Elmer Dunn that I come to Crocketville in the first place. I got a letter from him a short time ago. An' when I saw how his mind was, I come down here to help him. I could do that, I figgered, an' visit you too. I brought him some money. An' I found he needed it, fur his mushroom business has bin a fizzle. Then when we was talkin' things over to-night, one of them pesky beasts that I saw in a cage on that show train, jumped through the windy. I went at it with my cane. Dunn was at the telephone. He went thar to break an ap'intment. An' it was thar that the critter bore him down an' clawed him."

We were walking deeper into the tunnel, with its clammy walls and sagging roof timbers. All of a sudden two green eyes loomed up ahead of us. Bang! Bang! Doc Fosse let loose with both barrels. There was another scream, just like the one that we had heard on the telephone. And then the animal fell dead.

It was a South American jaguar, Doc Fosse said.

I still thought there was a kid in the tunnel. For I never dreamed that an animal could scream like that. But jaguars could, I was told.

And now, having cleared up that part of my story, I think I'll go to bed. For I'm dead tired.

I'll tell the rest to-morrow night. And maybe by that time I'll have some new stuff to put down.

CHAPTER XIX

THE MYSTERY ENDS

November 1—The snow that started a week ago to-night is all gone. But the streets are still full of puddles. And the river is full to the brim. This kind of weather is bad for hardwood floors. For kids are bound to track in more or less dirt no matter how carefully they wipe their feet at the door. I keep yelling at Slats and Tail Light. But you can see their tracks all over the house. The rugs look kind of dirty too. So, I guess I'll have to put on another house-cleaning act to-morrow morning. For I want the house to be nice and neat when my ma gets home. And from the way she talks now, when she calls me up on the telephone, the Chicago doctors are likely to wind up my pa's case any minute. So it's up to me to get busy.

Oh, boy! It sure will be a happy moment for me when that old flivver of ours pulls into the yard. And if my ma doesn't get a cracked rib it will be a wonder. For I'm going to hug her like an old bear. I'm going to hug my pa too.

For I'm not so big. And he thinks it's all right for me to hug him.

He had a pretty close call, I guess. For blood poison is bad stuff. But my ma stuck right there and helped pull him through. That's why I want to have things looking nice and neat when she gets home. For she's been worrying like the dickens. I can tell by the way she talks. And it will be a big relief to her, I know, if she comes in and finds everything in order.

I spoke about the dirty floor when Uncle Hezzie and I were eating supper to-night. And I think it's his plan to help me clean up. For he gave his head a funny little jerk. That means something. And later I saw him peeking at the dirty ceiling in his room.

That's the thing that bothers me the most. Gee! It wasn't my fault that the ceiling got smoked up. I did the very best I could. But it's going to make my ma feel sick when she comes home and sees that room. For she went to a lot of work to fix it up for company. And now, as I say, it looks like the inside of a smoke house.

Just before Uncle Hezzie and I got up from the supper table to-night Miss Tidy Potts breezed in with another cake. Boy! She sure is a persistent old thing, all right. But I'm afraid she won't have any luck with Uncle Hezzie. For he isn't interested in lonely old maids. She just *loved* to play dominoes, she said, as she feasted

her eager eyes on him. But instead of taking the hint, and following her home, Uncle Hezzie told her bluntly that he was going to put in the evening varnishing his peg-leg.

Gosh! He sure is a funny old coot. To hear him thunder around you'd think that he was harder than nails. And maybe he is in some ways. But there's nothing hard about his heart. It still bothers him, I guess, to think that he wasn't consulted when my ma and my pa started out to find a name for me. And maybe if they had named me Hezekiah I'd be in luck. For he's got plenty of jack, all right. But I wouldn't change my name for that. For I've got a good strong body. I think I've got a pretty good head on me too. So, when I grow up, I can make my own money. That's what he did. And I want to do the same thing.

Still, if he wants to slip me twenty bucks for a bicycle it won't make me sore. I'd like to own a rifle too. But I suppose my ma would have seven cat fits if she saw me start for the woods with a real rifle. She even fusses around when I get out my old air gun.

Betty Sharpe wants to make up with me now. For she has heard a lot of nice talk about me. But I'm like Uncle Hezzie. I don't care for women, outside of my own ma. So Betty will never get the chance to put her maiden name on my family tombstone.

The general idea around town is that I solved the tunnel mystery all alone. And that's why Betty is so eager to get on the good side of me. But I don't claim all the credit for the mystery's solution. Take the jaguar. It was Doc Fosse and Uncle Hezzie who thought up that part. Still, if the Crocketville people want to keep on patting me on the back, that's perfectly o-k with me.

The jaguar got away from the show people. And they were kind of peeved when they heard that it had been shot. It was a pet, they said. But when they learned how it had jumped into a house through a window, and what it did after it got there, they shut up. And an hour later they were on their way to another part of the state. Uncle Hezzie didn't know them. He just got a chance to ride in their coach. Nor did the mushroom man know them, though earlier he was a showman himself. It's an odd thing that he should have feared such an animal, and then have one like it single him out that way. But he's all right now. For the bat that he got on the head brought him to his senses. And as soon as he's able to travel, he and Uncle Hezzie are going south for the winter. As I understand it, they're old schoolmates, just like Friday and me. And that's why Uncle Hezzie felt so concerned when he learned of the other man's wild ideas.

Fear is bad stuff, especially guilty fear. If you keep it in your mind too much it gets the best of you. And so it was with the mushroom man. He got to thinking of all the mean stuff he did when he was an animal trainer. And so the fear fixed itself in his guilty mind that the animal that had suffered the most at his hands —now a thing without color!—was trying to creep up on him.

As for Dr. Vett, he's just a plain nut. I suppose he'll put in the rest of his life fiddling with those crazy machines of his. For he's too old to change his belief in spirits. But Mrs. Clarkey herself is a changed woman. She laughs at her old fears. For she knows now that she let her imagination get away with her, just as she told us that stormy night when we were leaving for home. And I suppose she'll try and talk sense into her goofy brother, who really felt that she was being haunted by the supposed materialized spirit. But I have a hunch, as I say, that Dr. Vett will keep on with his crazy beliefs till he's done for. And he's liable to act just as queer around others as he did around me when he found me meddling with that imitation wart of mine.

When I got back from the tunnel last Wednesday night, I went directly to Mrs. Clarkey's house, late as it was, and told her what I had discovered in the kitchen. The enemy that she

feared, I said, wasn't hiding in the tunnel at all. Nor was it a man. It was a woman, I said. And she was right in that very house.

Then I told who the woman was.

Mrs. Clarkey cried. For she was all worked up. And it hurt her to think that anyone whom she trusted could be so treacherous. She really liked the unworthy servant, she said, as she dabbed at her eyes with a pink handkerchief. And then who should walk in on us but the listening schemer herself. She had her coat on. And now she's gone, bag and baggage, glad, I guess, to get away without a brush with the law.

She spit out a lot of mean things that night. Gee! I never dreamed that a woman could have so much meanness inside of her. She didn't believe in spirits at all. She just talked that way to keep Mrs. Clarkey on edge. It was a scheme to break down the widow's mind. That was to have been her pay for what her husband did.

All Madam Altura put on that tunnel séance for was to fix in Professor Clarkey's mind a fear of the snake-handled poker. For she intended later on to bring his attention to the peculiar poker in a way that would frighten him. Maybe she even intended to kill him. I don't know. But it so happened that he died naturally. And for a time no thought was given to his widow. The medium's hate kept growing though. For she had lost a fortune. And so she

decided to revenge herself on the hated man's widow.

The medium and Mrs. Dorn were sisters. And at the time of the tunnel séance Mrs. Dorn was living with her husband in that neighborhood. I'll tell more about that in a later paragraph. For without her sister's help, as you'll see, the medium never could have pulled that final trick.

Needing work, after her husband's death, Mrs. Dorn first attracted Dr. Vett's attention, through her pretended belief in spirits, and then openly asked for the housekeeping job. He was glad to hire her. For he liked her. She was all right then. But later she got to boiling inside over the way her sister had been exposed. Then the two sisters got together. And Mrs. Dorn promised, when the scientist's widow showed up, to start filling the newcomer's mind with supernatural fears. The door hinges were oiled, so that the scheming servant could sneak around without being detected. And it was these constant secret movements that first put the idea into Mrs. Clarkey's head that she was being haunted. Once her fears were aroused it was easy for the scheming servant to drop an appropriate word now and then to help matters along. Finally it was decided by the two sisters to produce the poker and thus make the widow believe that some sinister peril was hanging over her.

Mrs. Dorn got the poker out of the tunnel herself. For she knew the mushroom man. And he readily gave her his keys. But how could she get the poker into the intended victim's hands? There was the question in the scheming servant's mind when we stopped to ask about the walnuts.

And the rest you know.

The tunnel séance itself was suggested to the bitter medium when she learned from her sister, in Crocketville, that a well driller, working on the Dorn farm, had just penetrated the abandoned tunnel. Of course, the well driller never intended to drill into the tunnel. And when his drill began to cut air he stopped. That left a four-inch hole in the tunnel roof. How easy, the exposed medium thought, to drop a small black cord through the hole (which was made smaller at the bottom end) and thus pull up a sheet, which would appear to raise of its own accord! And so the séance was planned. Everything was timed to a second. At exactly twelve o'clock, after the fires had been built (and the main purpose of the fires was to hide the ceiling in a cloud of smoke) the expected black cord dropped into the waiting medium's hands. It was easy for her to hook the cord into the provided sheet, which began to raise. Mrs. Dorn did that, up in her yard. Mr. Dorn himself was hidden around a bend in the tunnel. It

was him who gave the hideous leering laugh when the light went out; and at the same time he darted forward in the darkness and grabbed the frightened goat by the throat, thus shutting off its possible cries. In another instant he was back out of sight. It wasn't a draft that put out the candle. It was the medium's husband. Everything was done to a plan. And the plan worked!

We got the most of the story from the bitter servant herself. The rest was pieced together in the tunnel, which got a lot of attention from the Crocketville people when they learned the particulars of the affairs. It was a clever trick, all right. And I'm not surprised that even Professor Clarkey himself was bewildered.

Just what Mrs. Dorn and her tricky sister intended doing after the recovery of the buried poker I don't know. But it's well for Mrs. Clarkey, I think, that the plot was exposed. For hatred often leads to some bad acts.

Gee! I wish my ma and my pa would hurry and come home.

November 2—Whoopee! You ought to see our house to-night. Everything is as slick as a button. For good old Uncle Hezzie hired a couple of women to-day. And they cleaned the house from top to bottom. We've also had a

paper hanger here. And now the company bedroom looks just as pretty as ever. Uncle Hezzie further matched the rug that got burned. And I doubt if my ma would ever know what happened there if I didn't tell her myself.

A hardware man called up this morning to tell me that he had some furnace grates that my pa had ordered. I had the grates put in right away. So now we have plenty of good clean heat.

I also found out to-day about those onions. Tony Crooker heard me order the first bushel. So he ordered the rest himself, giving my name. I made the Greek come and get the extra onions to-day. And was he ever peeved! But he shut up in a hurry when Uncle Hezzie lit into him.

(Later.) I just got a call from my ma. She and my pa are starting for home. Oh, boy! Oh, boy! Oh, boy! I'm so happy I could kiss a pig.

(Still later.) Oh, oh, oh! The furnace is fixed and the house is cleaned and the company bedroom is freshly papered. But I forgot one thing. I forgot to bring in my ma's rubber plant! But if Uncle Hezzie goes to Mexico, as he says, he can easily get us another rubber plant. So why worry about it?

Slats just tumbled in. He expects to make some money, he said. For he just left a note on

Miss Potts' front porch telling her how glad we'll be to rent old Bumfuzzle to her for only two dollars a month.

Gee! If we can get two dollars out of her, we can make some more cockeyed ghosts and get rich.

Slats told me something else that gave me a big laugh. His little brother, I understand, is a much better fighter than I suspected. He even tackled one of Tony's champion warriors this afternoon. Mrs. Beale was watching them. And when Tail Light came into the house she says: "Were you playing marbles with that bad boy?" And Tail Light says: "Naw! I socked him in the jaw. And I was helping him pick up his teeth."

Gee! With a kid like that in my gang I ought to do a lot. So when you get ready to read my next diary, don't be surprised if I start it off with a big rotten-egg battle. For Tony Crooker can't load me down with stinking old onions without paying for it.

THE END

OUR CHATTER-BOX

AND now that you know all about the mushroom man and the vanished goat (this is Leo Edwards speaking), suppose we give our attention to some of the bully good letters and other interesting contributions that I have here in our "fan" mail-box.

As I have said over and over again, the purpose of this department (Our Chatter-Box) is to give boys and girls the opportunity to express themselves in print.

There's a definite friendly tone throughout all of my books. I want it to be that way, for that's the way I feel toward my jolly young readers. We're all pals together. Here in my own town (where we drink water out of a pump!) I have young pals that I can take by the hand. I can't do that with all the boys and girls in the country. So, to reach the boys and girls outside of my own town, I maintain this friendly department, in which outstanding letters and other contributions are printed.

Would you like to have a letter or a poem published in the Chatter-Box of my next book? Well, it's up to you. I'm constantly on the lookout for unusual letters. So try and put something into your letter or poem that will interest other young readers. Don't simply write a letter praising my books. I'm mighty happy to have you feel that way about the stuff I write. But our peppy young readers want NEWS.

Many fans (to judge from their letters) cling to the belief that if they write me a letter, and the letter is published, the writer of the letter gets a free autographed book. That isn't the case at all. Writers of published letters get no award except the permanent satisfaction of seeing their letters in print.

Writers of published poems DO receive free autographed books. But don't do like so many hasty young poets—don't send me any old kind of a poem and conclude by naming the particular book that you want. Our poem department is not conducted that way.

If you send me a poem, and that poem is printed, then I will send you a free specially autographed copy of the book in which your poem appears, just as soon as the book is off the press. That ought to be clear to everybody.

And now let us go into this pile of letters and see what's what.

LETTERS

OUR first contributor is Margaret Parkhill, 34 Lawrence St., Bloomfield, N. J., who writes: "I must tell you about the Jerry Todd play we gave in school. The pupils were supposed to get together outside of school and get up a play referring to literature. So my girl friends and some other kids and myself got together and made up a little play from 'Jerry Todd in the Whispering Cave.' The scene took place where Jerry dodges into the cave with the Strickers hot on his heels, only instead of going under the bed, Jerry had to go under the teacher's desk. My friend was Jerry and I was the crazy minister. I came in singing 'The bear went over the mountain,' and wearing a dinky little red hat with a long red feather sticking out of it, a pair of father's pants, a coat (ten times too big for me), a bright red vest and last but not least a pair of number eight shoes which went clip, clop, when I walked. I came in and said crazy things, much to the amusement of the class. All was going well when alas and alack the safety pin which held up my pants gave way and down came my trousers, much to my embarrassment of course, but the kids thought it was great. Luckily I had my regular dress on. On the whole our play was a big success and the teacher thought our acting very good."

I wonder how many more boys and girls would like to put on a short play like that? I have written dozens of plays for the radio, taken from my books. So, if you want to put on a little play in your school, write to me and see if I haven't something that you can use. There will be no charge for this service except the postage required.

And now I'm going to publish a letter that was written to me by my own son, Beanie, when his mother and I were in Florida a short time ago. The sons of authors, you'll find out, are very much like other boys. So here goes: "It is Saturday night. I've had my supper and I'm tired as heck. I have been having a swell time to-day. Here's what I did: This morning I got up at seven. Worked all morning. After dinner, about one o'clock, I went down town and got fifteen cents' worth of veal and some carrots and potatoes and a parsnip and two onions. Also I got a fire grate and an express wagon and I loaded all the stuff on the wagon and then set out into the country. I left the wagon at Stairs' corner while

I went down to our closed cottage and got two kettles and a fork. Then I went and got the wagon and went to Stairs' house and got a pail of water and then went down to the Methodist grounds. Clair Goodrich was along and I set him to picking up wood and after awhile, with one match, I got a fire started and put on the HUNTERS' STEW, which I had read about in my Boy Scout book. Then after awhile Fritz Stair came down where I was for the Scoutmaster had told him that I would give him a cooking test. Fritz cooked one egg and some bacon. I had to eat half of everything in order to pass the test. The bacon was swell but I never did like eggs. Then along came Fat Dillon and Cully Christianson, for the Scoutmaster had told them they could come out to the place where I was and pass their pacing tests to me. The test is to cover a mile in twelve minutes, fifty paces running and fifty paces walking. Cully tried it twice but did not pass the test. Fat tried it three times, and the third time I passed him. Then I went back to the camp fire, which Fritz had been watching, and the HUNTERS' STEW was all ready to eat. Everything was cooked fine and tender and I got out my plate and I took some and all the fellows took some and all said it was good and wished there was more. All the time we were cooking the stew, and telling how good it was and smelling of it, Ruth Alice Stair stood around and watched us. She acted just like she thought we were a bunch of hoodlums. You ought to see her look when Fritz grabbed a big hunk of meat in his paw and says, 'I'm a caveman! Gr-r-r-r!' Then he tore the meat apart with his teeth. I thought I could get rid of her by telling stories, so I told about the hike Rosey and I took, and how we found a dead cow, and how awful it looked. I told all about it. I told about the smell too. And then I asked Ruth Alice if she wanted some stew. She looked horrified. But she could have saved that horrified look for we didn't intend to give her any anyway. After gobbling down the stew, and fighting over the sweet pickles that I bought, we picked ourselves up and started for home. I got home about supper time."

Al Parsell, Jr., 2 Paul St., Auburn, N. Y., is the writer of the next letter. Here it is: "I bought my younger brother a Trigger Berg book for his birthday. I wanted to read the book first, and so did he, so we compromised and I read it aloud to him. Dad was behind the evening newspaper and mother supposedly was reading a magazine. When I came to the part where the girl treasure hunters pegged rocks into the barrels in which Trigger and his four pals were hiding, the paper slipped down and dad went 'Haw! Haw!' And mother looked over her magazine and giggled. This shows that they

were paying more attention to what I was reading than to their own reading. Personally I think that Trigger is the liveliest little fellow I have ever met. I like to write stories very much and was very glad to read your advice to would-be authors. Our high-school paper has accepted two stories which I submitted. One was published last year and the other this year. This sort of makes me feel good. I also have written several short stories just for the fun of doing it.''

Fred A. Michel, Jr., 257 Puritan Ave., Forest Hills, N. Y., is the next contributor. Fred writes: ''The first time I ever read one of your books was when I was visiting a cousin of mine who lives in Westchester, Pa. His name is Donald Lowrie, and he is a Freckled Goldfish. I didn't have any school. But the sad part of it is that he had school. So I resigned myself to the fate of reading books all week. I looked through the book case thinking that I would have to read Tom Swift or a Don Sturdy book, when all of a sudden I saw a book with a very queer-sounding name. The name of the book I saw was 'Poppy Ott and the Galloping Snail.' Wondering how a snail could possibly gallop, I picked out the book and started to read it. Mostly out of curiosity, I guess. Within five minutes I was giggling and guffawing so loudly that my aunt came in to see what was the matter with me. After that I became an ardent Jerry Todd and Poppy Ott fan. Of the two series I like the Todds the best, because Jerry has the whole gang in his books.''

Many thousands of boys have written to me, asking me to put Jerry's complete gang in both the Todd and Ott books. That was easy to do. So now you'll find Scoop, Peg, Rory, Red and Jerry himself in all of the Ott books.

Fred asks too how he can secure a picture of me. And the answer is, send a single dime to Leo Edwards' Secretary, Grosset & Dunlap, 1140 Broadway, New York, N. Y. But when you see the picture, if you think you got cheated, don't blame me!

Jimmie Baker, 119 W. Pembroke, Dallas, Texas, writes: ''I'm a loyal Jerry Todd fan and I read every one of your books that I can get my hands on. Poppy Ott and I are good friends too. I like all your books because they are full of chills, thrills, shivers and shakes. And are they exciting! Oh, boy! The egg fight in 'Jerry Todd, Pirate,' was plenty keen, only I sure would hate to have a rotten egg pitched at me.''

Here's an unusual letter. It is from Henry N. Baum, 11229 South Washtenaw Ave., Chicago, Ill. Henry writes: ''I have read six Jerry Todd books and one Poppy Ott book. Is Tutter a real town? Where is it? My name is Henry Baum. My grandfather wrote the 'OZ' books and my father writes history books for children.''

Yes, Henry, Tutter is indeed a real town. That's where I grew up, down in La Salle county, Ill. But Tutter isn't the town's real name, nor will you find Ashton or Steam Corners on your Illinois map. But try and find a very small town with a canal running through it, with the Illinois river about a mile away.

Billy Kelly, 918 Washington St., Olean, N. Y., writes: "I received your picture and have framed it. In the wide margin I put my Freckled Goldfish card. It looks swell hanging in my bedroom."

Here is an unusual contribution—a cross-word puzzle, built around my books. Harry Nixon, Box 1336, Uniontown, Pa., is the young author. I wish I could reproduce the puzzle. But I can't; so that's that. But thanks, Harry, just the same.

And now I'm going to drop the letters and tell you something about the pictures that I have here. Oh, boy! If I ever get to the bottom of this pile it will be a wonder.

PICTURES

WILLIAM B. HALL, 504 West 129th St., New York, N. Y., is the first young Goldfisher to come up for mention. Here's his picture. It was taken two years ago, he states, when he was in camp. He was eleven then; he was thirteen when he wrote his letter; but I suppose he's much older than that now, for these pictures DO pile up. Bill says he likes all of my books. And I want to tell him in return that I took a liking to him the minute that picture of his popped up under my nose.

Next in line is a nice looking chap, holding one of my books. His name is Jack Wright, and he lives at 32-24 Florence Ave., Bayside, L. I., N. Y. Jack signs his letter: "Your pal and everything else you'd like me to be." Which I think is great. A Freckled Goldfish, Jack lost his pin when he stopped to eat at a roadside restaurant. He happened to go back to the restaurant a few days later, and found his Goldfish pin hung on the wall in a collection of curios. Pretty good, huh?

My, oh, my! This next bird must be the champion high-jumper of St. Paul, Minn., for here he is, in athletic attire, apparently ready to jump over the moon. His name is Bob Wright, and he lives at 2189 Stanford, in the city mentioned. He is Freckled Goldfish No. 321, so you can see he is one of the older fans. He writes: "I've been a reader of yours ever since your 'Purring Egg' story was published, in 1925, in the American Boy." Then he goes on to say: "I have studied each of your books carefully, noting the plot, method of planning, etc., and about three months ago I decided that I knew enough about your style of writing to try my own hand. I completed a semi-long story, in rather an informal easy form, and sent it to a popular boys' magazine. This story

was written in the approved Leo Edwards style. About two weeks later my manuscript came back with a letter of criticism. The main trouble, according to the letter, was not the plot, but the form of writing. It seems that I started many of my sentences with And, But, Or, For, Now, etc. These words are known as subordinate conjunctives, and it is a terrible grammatical error to use them to start a sentence. I do not understand this criticism. You use this form entirely in all your books. For an example: I turned at random to a page in your 'Caveman' book and picked out the sentences beginning this way. Page 51 it was. There are five sentences of this type on this page, two 'ands' two 'buts' and a 'now.' Now why should they kick on my using this method and not on you? Is there a patent on the form? I sent the same manuscript to two other magazines, and the same thing happened. I immediately tried to rewrite my story, but I had studied your type of writing so well, and was so used to using it, that I found that I would have to learn an entirely new style of writing if I am to succeed in the writing business. Could you offer any advice about this problem.''

Well, Bob, let me say first of all that you made a grave mistake by not creating a style of writing of your own. My style is my own. If I get away from it my stuff sounds silly and insincere. I couldn't possibly write a good story in another author's style. You must remember that my stories, written in the first person, MUST sound boyish in order to seem real. When you start talking about subordinate conjunctives I don't know what you mean. And I don't care — another paragraph started with ''And!'' I know how boys talk; and that's the way I write; and that's the way I'm going to continue to write. I'm letting the man who can write perfect English have it all to himself. My theory is that a boy's reading should be balanced. He should be taught to enjoy the classics; and at the same time he should be permitted to enjoy something written in a lighter more skylarking vein. To show the value of this I have only to turn to a letter that I received from a parent in Philadelphia. There was a boy in the family. The neighbors called him a ''red-headed devil.'' He wouldn't mind his parents; he disobeyed his teachers; he wouldn't read any kind of books outside of school. Someone gave him a Jerry Todd book. And what happened? He liked the book; he found there are good pals in books; now he's a changed boy. He's trying to be like Jerry. And he's reading the better class of books too. When a book will do that for a boy, who was the despair of his own parents, there must be something to it, even if it does violate many of the set rules of grammar. Often when I'm working on a book I write a paragraph correctly.

And then I purposely twist the words around to make it boyish.

The next picture to turn up shows a boy with a dog. The lad is Eugene "Jiggs" Johnson, and his address is Box 164, Frostburg, Md. "Here I am," writes Jiggs, "broadcasting on a frequency of eight hundred and sixty-two million billion bicycles by authority of the Federal Radio-Phonograph Compensation." Jiggs adds: "I got 'Poppy Ott and the Freckled Goldfish' for Christmas, and it laid me all around the room from getting weak because of laughing." After Jiggs comes James Walsh, a fine-looking little lad, living in West Haven, Conn., at 16 White St. Jim has a Freckled Goldfish club. Now let's swing south, and give due mention to this picture of Charles Edward Dougherty, 731 North Beard St., Shawnee, Okla. Ed is shown in a rowboat, with one of his pals. Boy, I bet they have fun down there! So-long, Ed. Thanks for the poem. But it wasn't quite as good as some others I have.

Starting a new paragraph, I find myself admiring the picture of Allen Coulter, 1563 Birchwood, Chicago, Ill. Al writes: "My mother said that your books were for children. But one night when I got out of bed to get some gumdrops I caught her reading one of your books. She didn't know that I saw her." Well, well! The next lad to come up for mention is a sure 'nuf Boy Scout, for here he is all dressed up in his Scout hat and everything. Herbert Kaplan is the name, and the address is 40 Gorton St. That's all. Maybe Gorton Street is in Boston, and maybe it isn't. But I hope this mention of Herb's picture gets into his hands. For he sure is a swell little guy.

In the next group I have four pictures of Louis Pyle, 89 Fairview Ave., Jersey City, N. J. He starts in looking very sober, and ends up with a big grin. Thanks, Louis. The winners in the "Musical Bedbug" contest will be announced in "Jerry Todd and the Flying Flapdoodle."

Hurrying along, here's a picture of Jack O'Neill, 15 Belvidere Ave., Holyoke, Mass. Jack gives a very interesting account of a miniature golf course that he and two of his cousins made. There was a rival golf course in the block, and frequently the proprietors of the rival businesses got out in the street and pitched stuff at each other. It must have been very exciting for all concerned, not overlooking the neighbors.

George Prestwich, 104 Strawbridge Ave., Westmont, N. J., comes next. George has a Goldfish club—a keen looking little lad, if you were to ask me. Then comes a young golfer, Bobby Frisch, 2608 Humboldt Ave. So., Minneapolis, Minn., then Bob McCaleb, 218 Fudge St., Covington, Va., and let's conclude the paragraph with mention of Paul Grenor, 45 Ardmore Road, West Hartford, Conn.

Oh, oh! There's a pretty little gal in the next picture—it's the young sister of Douglas J. Feuerman, 644 Aldine St., Chicago, Ill. Doug is in the picture too, and there's another one showing him in camp.

Billy Beerman, 1202 Hill St., Latham Park, Greensboro, N. C., is next—and what a grin! Bill wants to start a Correspondence Chapter of the Freckled Goldfish, and has asked me to urge you to write to him. After Bill comes a lad who signs himself "A Trigger Berg Fan," and his name is Rosslyn Pentel. He lives at 6516 Lafayette Ave., Chicago, Ill.

And now, to conclude this group, I'm going to mention several pictures in a hurry. First shake hands with J. Parsons, Jr., 206 N. Second St., Darby, Pa. Next grab the mitt of Kerr Collingwood, Dongan Hills, Staten Island, N. Y. Then slant your eyes at Ramon Hatchett, 1141 Henry St. S. W., Roanoke, Va. George Griffith, 809 Foothill Road, Beverly Hills, Cal., is next—he's shown on a swell pony and there's a separate picture of the pony itself.

And that's all for this time. The other pictures in the pile will be mentioned in a later Chatter-Box.

POEMS

ACCOMPANYING the first poem is a splendid drawing, in colors, of the jacket (or paper cover) of the second Trigger Berg book. This fine drawing was made by Eloise Brown, P. O. Box 705, Andalusia, Ala. Evidently Eloise is both an artist and a poet. I can't show you her drawing, but here's her poem:

How Pickles Got His Nickname

Little Egbert was a very bad boy,
As rude as rude could be.
And when his temper flamed,
Oh, my! Oh, my! Oh, me!

You'll find him in the Mouse Trap book,
Slats took him in his home.
But he was such an awful "Egg"
He made the family groan.

He picked up all the things in reach
And flung them far and wide.
(Though had it been *me*, I dare say,
My mother would've tanned my hide!)

Slats got his chums together.
"When *I* get mad," grinned he,
"I throw things just like Egbert,
So don't say 'Pickles' to me."

So it was through saying "Pickles,"
That Slats showed little Egg-ee,
Just how ridiculous
A spoiled rude kid could be.

And now when Egbert's temper rises,
As quick as quick can be,

He hollers out the word
"PICKLES!"
That's how he got his nickname, you see.

And having wrapped up an autographed copy of this book for Eloise, I now hasten on to the next poem, written by John Alan Ferguson, 524 W. Bijou St., Colorado Springs, Colo.

His name is Meyers, "Red" if you please,
He likes to go swimming in his B.V.D's.
He eats anything from toothpicks to tea,
His chums are Jerry, Scoop and me.

My name is Peg Shaw, a hefty guy,
If you don't watch out I'll black your eye.
I'm not as fierce as I make myself sound.
With my chums I like to fool around.

We camp on Oak Island once in awhile.
On our faces there's sure to be a smile
When our teacher says, "Excused for vacation."
Oh, boy! Are we glad? Gollyation!

Our worst enemy is the Stricker gang,
A bunch of young toughs who use too much slang.
We like to hit them with tomatoes so ripe.
And then for a week you hear them gripe.

Scoop and Jerry are two keen pals;
Jerry's kind of bashful around the gals.
If you ever find a gang that's better than ours
We'll hand you the cake, and plenty of flowers.

John gets an autographed book for that. And I'm hoping that some time I'll be able to visit him, as he suggests.

Leo Briggs, 79 Windom Ave., Arochar, L. I., N. Y., is the author of the next prize-winning poem. Here it is:

The Totem Pole

In Red's yard they dug a hole
To stand a stately totem pole.
On top the pole a queer man sat,
With piercing eyes and tall black hat
And just as Jerry's gang had feared,
The pole that night disappeared.

The next poem is unique because it is written in the form of a letter. The writer is "Dick"—that's the only name I have, and the address is Box 226, San Marcos, Texas.

Dear Leo Edwards: I'm trying to think of an original letter. This is the best I can do, though perhaps you can do better. However, as I was going to say, I like your books in almost every way. I like Jerry Todd better than the rest of the boys, although they are all happy and have lots of joys. Red seems to be the funniest and I like him swell. What he'll grow up to be no one of us can tell.

Scoop Ellery is interesting enough, but Peg's the one, I like his stuff. Rory Ringer is a Henglish lad. He says heagle, but he's not really bad. Poppy Ott, he's the smartest of all. He's got a head on him like a cannon-ball. I try everything that your books suggest. But never yet have I met with success. After reading 'Jerry Todd and the Oak Island Treasure,' I started a show, that gave lots of pleasure. But the show quickly went out of commission, when the cow (elephant) kicked the strong man in his addition. The dogs got in and chased the cats out, no wonder the audience did laugh and shout. When I get through with 'Jerry Todd, Pirate,' I thought I'd have some fun. We got some rotten eggs and knocked out everyone. They were the smelliest kind of eggs—no wonder the people were knocked off their legs. And no wonder too our folks got out; less wonder still they didn't kick us about. When after racing through 'Editor in Grief,' we published a newspaper, how Pa did beef. The Scandal Sheet was the name it went by, I'd send you a copy if there weren't so many mistakes to make you sigh. Our pickles we made tasted like heck. We threw them into the river by the peck. After emptying them into the river we sighed. When we came back all the fish had died. We made a boat too, but it was a lot of junk. The first time we launched it, it turned over and sunk. I've tried other of your schemes too. But they all turned out about as cuckoo. But bring on more books with schemes. I guess I'll try them all, maybe some day I'll find success. I've tried to make all this rhyme, but I don't think I've succeeded every time. However this time this will have to do, and I'm sending you good luck, to your books and you."

All right, Dick Whatever-your-name-is. I hope you get the book I'm sending you.

The next poem is much shorter. The writer is Arthur Nelson, 4930 W. Erie St., Chicago, Ill. The poem reads as follows:

Two good chums are Todd and Ott,
My favorite author writes the plot,
Grosset & Dunlap publish the story,
H'and H'I hinjoy hit, as would say Rory.
This poem is terrible, and I know it.
Alas for me, I am not poet.

But in this funny way
I have tried to convey,
A fact that's very strong,
50 MILLION BOYS
CAN'T BE WRONG!

All right, Art. Here's an autographed book for you.

John Olyslager, who gives his address as the Brighton Reformed Sunday-School Library, 440 Atlantic Ave., Rochester, N. Y., has contributed this lengthy poem:

Jerry Todd and the Waltzing Hen

Jerry, Scoop, Red and Peg

Wanted to go to a show.
But Jerry had no money.
So how could he go?
He asked his father for money;
Mr. Todd solemnly shook his head.
Jerry kept figuring, how *can* I go
With Scoop 'n Peg 'n Red?

Red helped Jerry paint a roof—
They split the five-dollar pay.
But Cap'n Boaz Tinkertop
Caught "TNIAP DER" that way.

Red started to act funny
And upset the can of paint,
Which fell on Cap'n Tinkertop
Who uttered a loud complaint.

"TNIAP DER" is "RED PAINT" backwards,
That's all it ever can be.
But I wouldn't like to have it,
If you ever ask me.

So the Cap'n was in a bad fix,
The boys tried to help him,
But soon weird adventures took place
That set them all a-yelpin'.

Mose, the porter, thought the bill poster
Had spirits in his trunk.
But Jerry, Scoop and Peg and Red,
Thought it was purely "bunk."

This bill poster came from India,
And he was Parkva, the Jain,
Who believed in transmigration,
Which I'll try and explain.

He thought that when a person died
He turned into a bear,
Or some other kind of animal
Like a cat, a hen or a hare.

And when they went into his house
They had to break the door,
For Parkva, the Jain's dead body
Was lying on the floor.

A yellow cat was under the bed,
It seemed like transmigration!
The boys suddenly thought of Jainism
Of which little is known in this nation.

They went through many adventures,
Exposed the whispering trunk,
Got mixed up with "TNIAP DER"
And proved that Jainism is "bunk."

SCHOOL CLUB

WHEN we organized our School Club, three years ago, it was understood that at the end of the first year there was to be a drawing, and the ten members whose names were drawn "from the hat" were to receive free autographed copies of the book in which their names were printed as prize winners.

Those names appeared in the third Trigger Berg book. Also, at that time, we published the names of all members.

Since then there has been a big addition to our club, so it is practically impossible to print the complete membership list. But the second drawing of twenty names has been made. And here are the names of the winners:

Gloria Harnick, 4130 N. Lawler Ave., Chicago, Ill.

John Dillon, 156 Broad St., San Francisco, Calif.

William Hadley, 14 Bailey St., Uxbridge, Mass.

Robert Currie, 6356 Torresdale Ave., Philadelphia, Pa.

Edward Maisel, 162 Claremont Ave., Buffalo, N. Y.

Pat Harness, 2932 Libscomb St., Fort Worth, Texas.

Herman Braunstein, 701 W. 176 St., New York, N. Y.

Rudolph Herman, 3642 S. Euclid Ave., Berwyn, Ill.

Shirley Blumenthal, 240 Seymour Ave., Newark, N. J.

James Francis Taggart, 985 Decatur St., Brooklyn, N. Y.

Charles Sanborn, 25 Madison Ave., East Orange, N. J.

Herbert Taub, 1256 Liberty St., Franklin, Pa.

James Cummins, 4630 S. Bishop St., Chicago, Ill.

Russell Helm, 5164 Broadway, Indianapolis, Ind.

Willard Carpenter, 150-13 Hoover Ave., Jamaica, N. Y.

Ralph Whittiem, 120 Colby Rd., N. Quincy, Mass.

Mark Hopkins, Jr., 624 North Warren St., Helena, Mont.

Gordon Cartmill, Box No. 279, Rapid City, S. Dak.

Rosslyn Pentel, 6516 Lafayette Ave., Chicago, Ill.

William H. Forst, 41 West 86 St., New York, N. Y.

There is no connection between the School Club and our big Freckled Goldfish Club. I'm going to tell you at the conclusion of this Chatter-Box how you can join the Goldfish Club. To become a member of the School Club you have simply to interest your teacher in one of my books; get her to read the book aloud, or let you read it aloud. When this has been done, write and tell me, and your name will be included in our School Club file.

The idea is to spread the fun that my books contain. You enjoy the books. They give you a lot of merry giggles. So why not share this fun with your schoolmates, many of whom may never have heard of Jerry Todd or Poppy Ott? If your teacher reads one of my books aloud, that will be fun for the whole room. And you get your name in our School Club.

We first drew ten names. Then we drew twenty names. And when the fifth Trigger Berg book goes to press, we'll draw thirty names. And each of these thirty boys and girls will get a free autographed copy of "Trigger Berg's Poodle Parlor" as soon as the book is off the press.

Here's an easy way for you to have fun and win a book. The thirty members whose names have already been drawn will not be included in the third drawing, for we al-

low only one book to a member.

If you'll explain this to your teacher, and show her what bully good fun there is in my books, I'm sure she'll consent to read one of the books aloud. Take the "Bob-Tailed Elephant" or "Whispering Mummy." All of the Todd, Ott, Berg and Bean books were written to be read aloud. Did you know that? Some books don't sound so well when read aloud. But here are books, as I say, that actually were written to be read aloud.

In connection with our School Club, I have this letter from Milton Marks, Jr., 263 29th Ave., San Francisco, California: "I have all of your Tuffy Bean books. And when I got them all the kids at school wanted to read them. I didn't see the books for six months hardly. They kept going and coming all the time. I just got a little dog which I named Tuffy and he looks exactly like Tuffy Bean. In other words, I'm Tuffy Bean crazy. I brought 'Tuffy Bean at Funny-Bone Farm' to school and had the teacher read it. So would you put me in the School Club? Yours till the pillow slips, Milt Marks, Jr."

Here's another letter which shows how well my books will be received at school if you take the trouble to introduce them there. The letter is from Jack McCue, 1912 Harrison Blvd., Boise, Idaho. It reads as follows: "I thought you might like to know an incident that happened in the classroom the other day. We have a reading table and we are allowed to bring books. I brought 'Jerry Todd and the Waltzing Hen' and 'Jerry Todd and the Talking Frog.' Other boys followed my example. A week later our teacher asked us for a book report. Friday, when the reports were turned in, 32 boys out of 41 had reports on Jerry Todd or Poppy Ott books."

"I brought 'Jerry Todd, Pirate,' to school," writes Robert McGregor, 423 E. Third St., South Boston, Mass., "and the teacher read it aloud. The boys were crazy over it."

"I have read all the Jerry Todd books except 'Editor-in-Grief.' writes Vic Schlitzer, Jr., 51 Arlington Road, Wellesley Hills, Mass. "The Poppy Ott books were as mincemeat to my manly, steady gaze. But only one Trigger Berg book yelled uncle yet. I wish to join your School Club as I took a book to school while I was in the sixth grade. The teacher read it a chapter each morning and the whole room enjoyed it very much."

"Last year," writes Laurence McDonnell, 43 Texas St., Lawrence, Mass., "we had a lending library at school. I was the librarian and my duties were to write down the number of the book, the pupil's name who borrowed the book and the date. We had seventeen of your books which were always out. If a

boy or girl wanted to get a Jerry Todd book they would have to submit their names to me before hand. On Friday afternoons while the girls sewed the boys took turns reading one of your books aloud. If this is what you mean by a School Club I think our class members who read the book should belong."

This next letter is from Gloria Harnick, 4130 N. Lawler Ave., Chicago, Ill. Gloria writes: "I would like to be a member of the School Club as my teacher has read my 'Rose-Colored Cat' book to the scholars in my room."

There, now! That shows you how well my books will be received in the schoolroom if you do your part and interest the teacher. Remember! We're going to draw thirty names the next time.

AUTOGRAPHED BOOKS

WOULD you like to have a collection of autographed Todd, Ott, Berg, Bean and Blake books? All boys and girls can't earn books by writing accepted poems and entering the School Club contest. I have a plan of furnishing autographed books. If you are interested, write to me at the address given at the conclusion of this Chatter-Box.

FRECKLED GOLDFISH

OUR Freckled Goldfish club is several years old. We have more than 20,000 members. Poppy Ott started the club. He and Jerry had a similar club in their book, "Poppy Ott and the Freckled Goldfish." Even before the book was published, informed young letter pals of mine were asking me if they could get up branch clubs like Poppy's. That gave me an idea. Why not organize a national club, calling it the Secret and Mysterious Order of the Freckled Goldfish, taking in members from coast to coast? "Fine!" said my publisher, when I presented the idea. So membership cards designed by Bert Salg were prepared, and soon requests for membership began to roll in. Members then wanted pins. These were provided. Then we published a little book, called a ritual, to help boys and girls who wanted to organize branch clubs.

To-day we have hundreds of branch clubs, all of which are providing boys and girls with added fun. I've attended many club meetings and I want to tell you that the young organizers of these clubs know their stuff. A boy or girl who can get up a club like that, and make a success of it, is a real leader. And if you want to be a leader, here is your chance to show what you can do.

To join the club simply observe the following rules:

(1) Print your name plainly.
(2) Supply your complete printed address.
(3) Give your age.
(4) Enclose two three-cent U. S. postage stamps.

(5) Address your letter to
Leo Edwards,
Cambridge,
Wisconsin.

Remember that each new member receives a unique membership card designed by Bert Salg, the popular illustrator of these books. The rules are printed on the card, which also contains a comical picture of Poppy's Freckled Goldfish. And every card bears my own personal autograph.

LOCAL CHAPTERS

ANY boy or girl who wants to start a Freckled Goldfish club in his own neighborhood can't afford to be without the official ritual. This booklet tells how to organize the club, how to conduct the meetings, how to transact all club business, and, probably most important of all, how to initiate candidates.

The complete initiation is given word for word. Naturally these booklets are more or less secret. So, if you send for one, please do not show it to anyone who isn't a Freckled Goldfish. The initiation will fall flat if the candidate knows what is coming. Three chief officers will be required to put on the initiation, which can be given in any boy's home, so, unless each officer is provided with a booklet, much memorizing will have to be done. The best plan is to have three booklets to a chapter. These may be secured (at cost) at six cents each (two three-cent stamps) or three for fifteen cents (five three-cent stamps).

CLUB NEWS

I HAVE many letters here, telling what the branch clubs are doing. And here's a newspaper clipping, which reads: "GOLDFISH CLUB GIVES TREASURY TO RELIEF. One of the most generous gifts this year to the Rahway Unemployment Relief Committee, though small in comparison with other gifts, was that made this week by the Freckled Goldfish Club, an organization of local girls. The club members voted to empty their treasury of every cent, totaling approximately a dollar. The money was invested in groceries which were delivered in person by the club members to Director George C. Andelfinger at the Unemployment headquarters in Irving street. Considerable ceremony attended the delivery made by Gold Fin Mary Elizabeth Card, Silver Fin Dorothy Wilkes and Freckled Fin Elizabeth Orton."

The club mentioned in the preceding paragraph has its headquarters at 54 Elm St., Rahway, N. J. There are twelve members in the club.

Local Chapter No. 396, with headquarters at 4636 Molden Ave., Chicago, Ill., has its own secret code book, copy of which has been sent to me. The president of the club, Bob Anderson, has contributed this poem:

Cavemen

"Back to nature,"
Cried Rory and Red.
The caveman stuff
Had gone to their head.

They started out
With an old rowboat.
Before long they had
A donkey and a goat

They took a sow
With a litter of ten—
They found the sow wandering
Outside of her pen.

They built a cart
With wheels of stone,
And Red was the king
With a necklace of bone.

His language was this:
"Icky wicky toot toot."
Till Peg threw a custard pie
Right in his snoot.

Cavemen were they
Both fearless and bold,
They'd planned to stay such
Until they were old.

But along come Red's pa
And several more.
And this was the end
Of the cavemen of yore.

"I have my membership card for the Freckled Goldfish club," writes Frank Knight, 1430 Myrtle Ave., El Paso, Texas, "and I think it's keen."

Here's a report from Gold Fin Chase Andrews, 237 Franklin Place, Flushing, N. Y. "At our first meeting we took four members into our pool. Each member has to bring something to hang on the wall of the pool. Our dues are ten cents a month and we go on hikes once a month. Our pool is a barn loft in my yard. The pins are neat. At our next meeting we will initiate three more members. We decided by vote to let only three candidates in at one time. We have a picture of the Freckled Goldfish on a board four feet long. It is hung on the wall of our pool."

"It was with great joy," writes Richard D. Voll, 2112 Tremont St., Fort Worth, Texas, "that I received my membership card and button. I showed the card and pin to my boy pals. And now I have interested several boys in our swell order."

"My friends and I are interested in starting a Freckled Goldfish club," writes Ross M. Raphael, 5107 North 13th St., Philadelphia, Pa. "We are all readers of Poppy Ott and Jerry Todd books. Please enter us as a chapter and send us four pins and membership cards."

Robert Bentson, 449 Downer Place, Aurora, Ill., has provided a list of the members in his branch club. I see the names of Parker Pearson, Richard Martinson, Bob Carlson, Stanley Humphreys, Bob Shaw and Richard Karsten.

And here's where I stop. Remember! I'll be looking for a letter from you. I need some good poems too. Address your letter to

Leo Edwards,
Cambridge,
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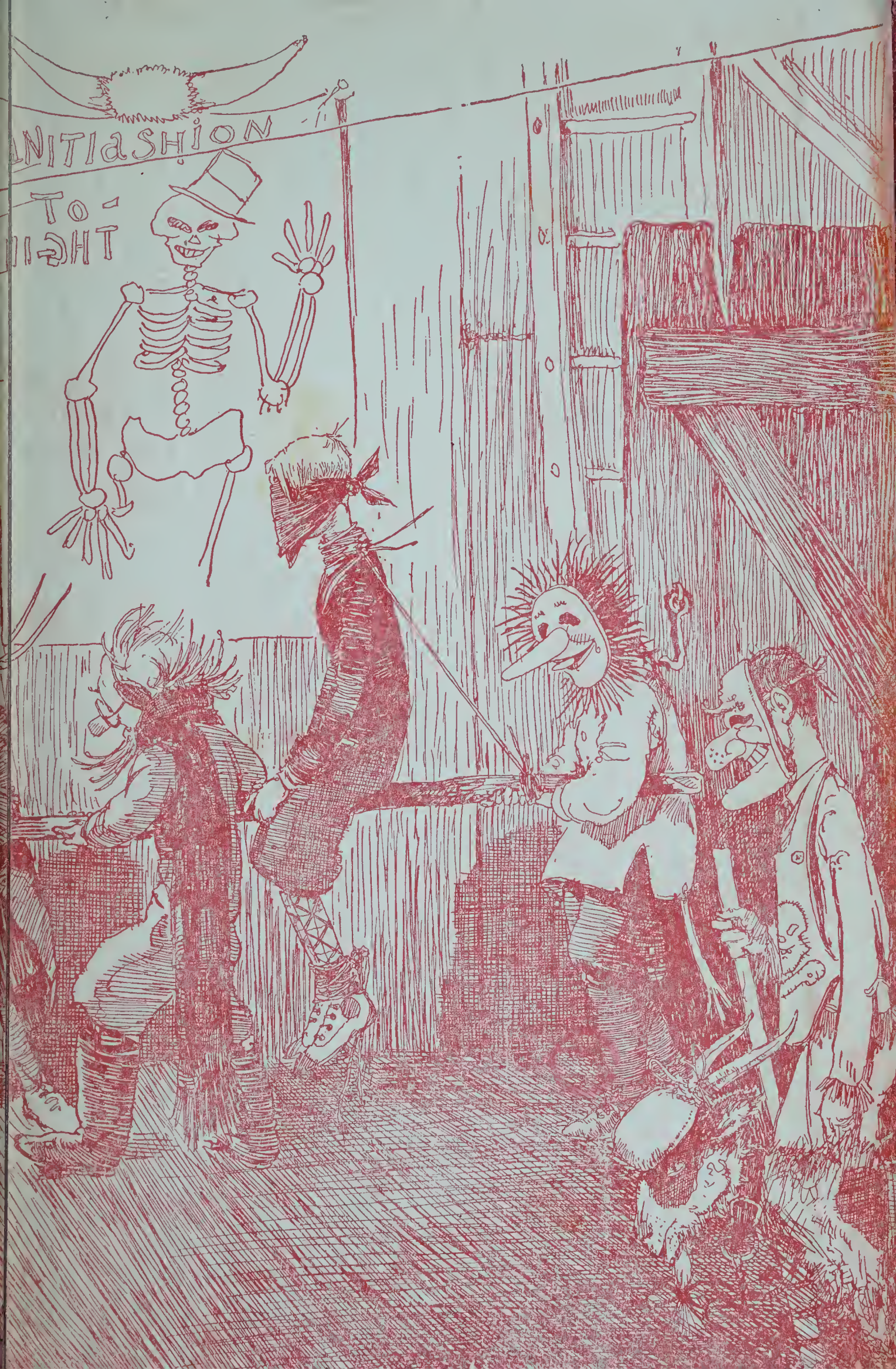
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